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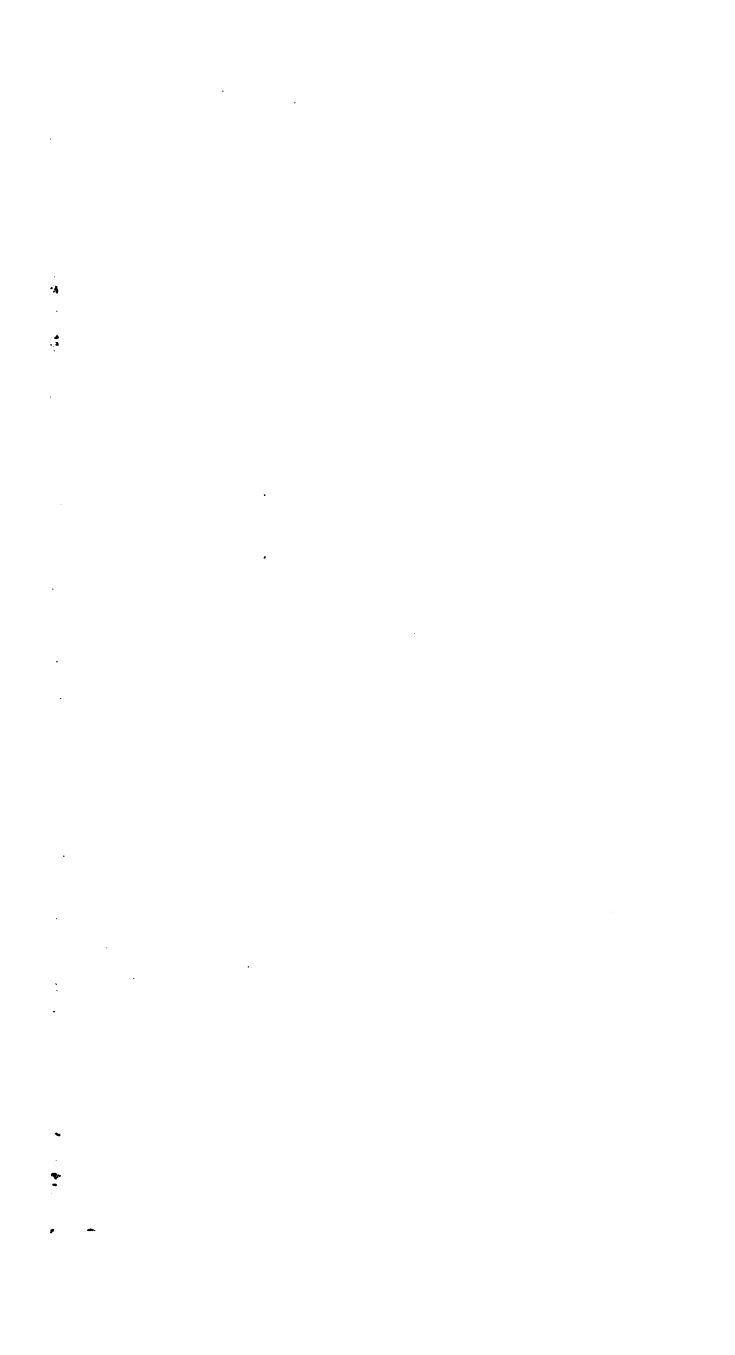
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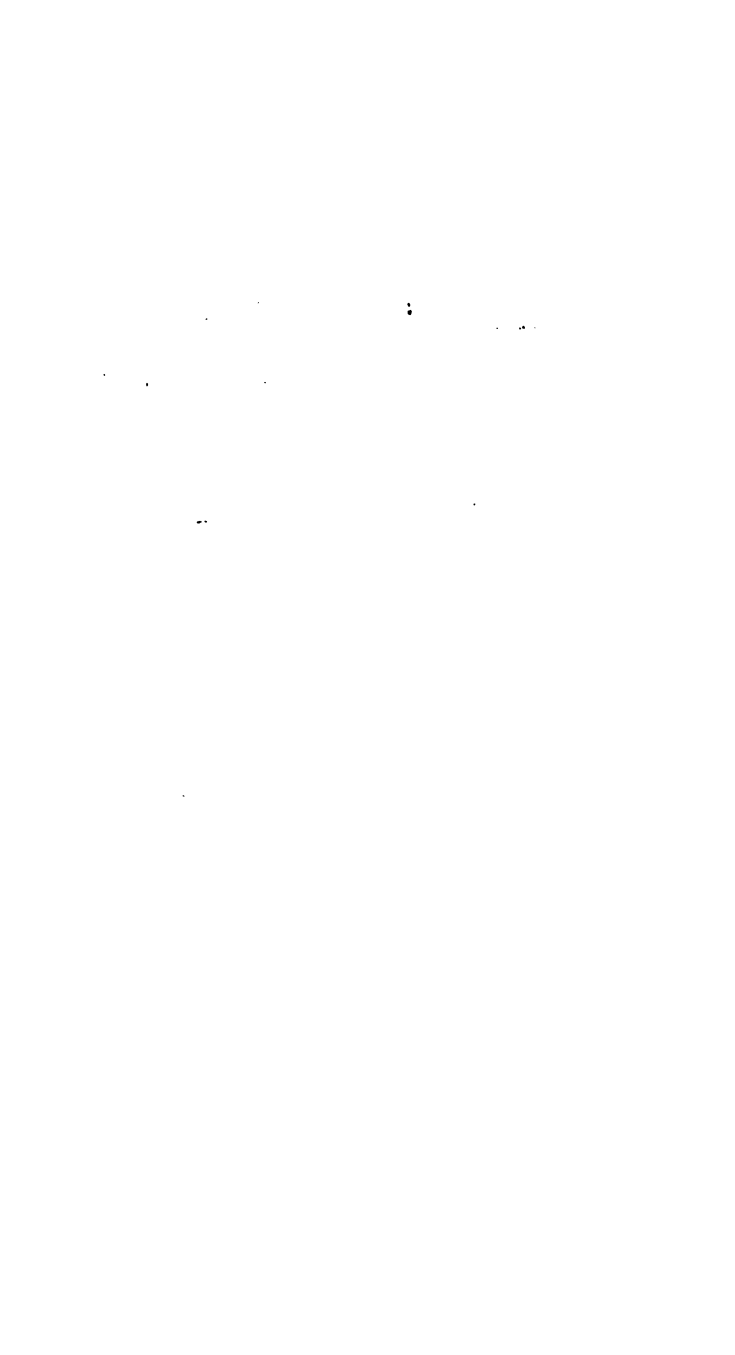


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H.P.



✓
Old World Series

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AMH



MODERN LOVE
AND OTHER POEMS



MODERN LOVE
AND OTHER POEMS BY
GEORGE MEREDITH



Portland, Maine
THOMAS B. MOSHER
Mdccciv

EVI

993752A

*This Second Edition
on Van Galder paper
consists of 925 copies.*



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MODERN LOVE



*This is not meat
For little people or for fools.*

BOOK OF THE SAGES

I

BY this he knew she wept with waking eyes :
That, at his hand's light quiver by her head,
The strange low sobs that shook their common bed
Were called into her with a sharp surprise,
And strangled mute, like little gaping snakes,
Dreadfully venomous to him. She lay
Stone-still, and the long darkness flow'd away
With muffled pulses. Then, as midnight makes
Her giant heart of Memory and Tears
Drink the pale drug of silence, and so beat
Sleep's heavy measure, they from head to feet
Were moveless, looking thro' their dead black years,
By vain regret scrawl'd over the blank wall.
Like sculptured effigies they might be seen
Upon their marriage-tomb, the sword between ;
Each wishing for the sword that severs all.

II

IT ended, and the morrow brought the task :
Her eyes were guilty gates that let him in
By shutting all too zealous for their sin :
Each suck'd a secret, and each wore a mask.
But, oh the bitter taste her beauty had !
He sicken'd as at breath of poison-flowers :
A languid humour stole among the hours,
And if their smiles encounter'd, he went mad,
And raged, deep inward, till the light was brown
Before his vision, and the world forgot,
Look'd wicked as some old dull murder spot.
A star with lurid beams, she seem'd to crown
The pit of infamy : and then again
He fainted on his vengefulness, and strove
To ape the magnanimity of love,
And smote himself, a shuddering heap of pain.

III

THIS was the woman; what now of the man?
But pass him! If he comes beneath our heel
He shall be crush'd until he cannot feel,
Or, being callous, haply till he can.
But he is nothing:—nothing? Only mark
The rich light striking from her unto him:
Ha! what a sense it is when her eyes swim
Across the man she singles, leaving dark
All else! Lord God, who mad'st the thing so fair,
See that I am drawn to her even now!
It cannot be such harm on her cool brow
To put a kiss? Yet if I meet him there!
But she is mine! Ah, no! I know too well
I claim a star whose light is overcast:
I claim a phantom-woman in the Past.
The hour has struck, though I heard not the bell!

IV

ALL other joys of life he strove to warm,
And magnify, and catch them to his lip :
But they had suffered shipwreck with the ship,
And gazed upon him sallow from the storm.
Or if Delusion came, 'twas but to show
The coming minute mock the one that went.
Cold as a mountain in its star-pitch'd tent
Stood high Philosophy, less friend than foe :
Whom self-caged Passion, from its prison-bars,
Is always watching with a wondering hate.
Not till the fire is dying in the grate,
Look we for any kinship with the stars.
Oh, wisdom never comes when it is gold,
And the great price we pay for it full worth.
We have it only when we are half earth.
Little avails that coinage to the old !

A MESSAGE from her set his brain aflame.
 A world of household matters fill'd her mind,
 Wherein he saw hypocrisy design'd :
 She treated him as something that is tame,
 And but at other provocation bites.
 Familiar was her shoulder in the glass
 Through that dark rain : yet it may come to pass
 That a changed eye finds such familiar sights,
 More keenly tempting than new loveliness.
 The ' What has been ' a moment seem'd his own :
 The splendours, mysteries, dearer because known,
 Nor less divine : Love's inmost sacredness,
 Call'd to him, " Come ! " — In that restraining start,
 Eyes nurtured to be look'd at, scarce could see
 A wave of the great waves of Destiny
 Convulsed at a check'd impulse of the heart.

VI

IT chanced his lips did meet her forehead cool.
She had no blush, but slanted down her eye.
Shamed nature, then, confesses love can die :
And most she punishes the tender fool
Who will believe what honours her the most !
Dead ! is it dead ? She has a pulse, and flow
Of tears, the price of blood-drops, as I know
For whom the midnight sobs around Love's ghost,
Since then I heard her, and so will sob on.
The love is here ; it has but changed its aim.
O bitter barren woman ! what's the name ?
The name, the name, the new name thou hast won ?
Behold me striking the world's coward stroke !
That will I not do, though the sting is dire.
— Beneath the surface this, while by the fire
They sat, she laughing at a quiet joke.

VII

SHE issues radiant from her dressing room,
Like one prepared to scale an upper sphere :
— By stirring up a lower, much I fear !
How deftly that oil'd barber lays his bloom !
That long-shank'd dapper Cupid with frisk'd curls,
Can make known women torturingly fair ;
The gold-eyed serpent dwelling in rich hair,
Awakes beneath his magic whisk and twirls.
His art can take the eyes from out my head,
Until I see with eyes of other men ;
While deeper knowledge crouches in its den,
And sends a spark up : — is it true we're wed ?
Yea ! filthiness of body is most vile,
But faithlessness of heart I do hold worse.
The former, it were not so great a curse
To read on the steel-mirror of her smile.

VIII

YET it was plain she struggled, and that salt
Of righteous feeling made her pitiful.
O abject worm, so queenly beautiful!
Where came the cleft between us? whose the fault?
My tears are on thee, that have rarely dropp'd
As balm for any bitter wound of mine:
My breast will open for thee at a sign!
But, no: we are two reed-pipes, coarsely stopp'd:
The God once filled them with his mellow breath;
And they were music till he flung them down,
Used! used! Hear now the discord-loving clown
Puff his gross spirit in them, worse than death!
I do not know myself without thee more:
In this unholy battle I grow base:
If the same soul be under the same face,
Speak, and a taste of that old time restore!

IX

His felt the wild beast in him betweenwhiles
So masterfully rude, that he would grieve
To see the helpless delicate thing receive
His guardianship through certain dark defiles.
Had he not teeth to rend, and hunger too?
But still he spared her. Once: "Have you no fear?"
He said: 'twas dusk; she in his grasp; none near.
She laughed: "No, surely; am I not with you?"
And uttering that soft starry 'you,' she lean'd
Her gentle body near him, looking up;
And from her eyes, as from a poison-cup,
He drank until the flitting eyelids screen'd.
Devilish malignant witch! And oh, young beam
Of Heaven's circle-glory! Here thy shape
To squeeze like an intoxicating grape—
I might, and yet thou goest safe, supreme.

BUT where began the change; and what's my crime?
 The wretch condemn'd, who has not been arraign'd,
 Chafes at his sentence. Shall I, unsustain'd,
 Drag on Love's nerveless body thro' all time?
 I must have slept, since now I wake. Prepare,
 You lovers, to know Love a thing of moods:
 Not like hard life, of laws. In Love's deep woods
 I dreamt of loyal Life: — the offence is there!
 Love's jealous woods about the sun are curl'd;
 At least, the sun far brighter there did beam. —
 My crime is that, the puppet of a dream,
 I plotted to be worthy of the world.
 Oh, had I with my darling help'd to mince
 The facts of life, you still had seen me go
 With hindward feather and with forward toe,
 Her much-adored delightful Fairy Prince!

XI

OUT in the yellow meadows where the bee
Hums by us with the honey of the Spring,
And showers of sweet notes from the larks on wing,
Are dropping like a noon-dew, wander we.
Or is it now ? or was it then ? for now,
As then, the larks from running rings send showers :
The golden foot of May is on the flowers,
And friendly shadows dance upon her brow.
What's this, when Nature swears there is no change
To challenge eyesight ? Now, as then, the grace
Of Heaven seems holding Earth in its embrace.
Nor eyes, nor heart, has she to feel it strange ?
Look, woman, in the west. There wilt thou see
An amber cradle near the sun's decline :
Within it, featured even in death divine,
Is lying a dead infant, slain by thee !

XII

Nor solely that the Future she destroys,
And the fair life which in the distance lies
For all men, beckoning out from dim rich skies :
Nor that the passing hour's supporting joys
Have lost the keen-edged flavour, which begat
Distinction in old time, and still should breed
Sweet Memory, and Hope,— Earth's modest seed,
And Heaven's high-prompting : not that the world is flat
Since that soft-luring creature I embraced,
Among the children of Illusion went :
Methinks with all this loss I were content,
If the mad Past, on which my foot is based,
Were firm, or might be blotted : but the whole
Of life is mixed : the mocking Past must stay :
And if I drink oblivion of a day,
So shorten I the stature of my soul.

XIII

“**I** PLAY for Seasons; not Eternities!”
Says Nature, laughing on her way. “So must
All those whose stake is nothing more than dust!”
And lo, she wins, and of her harmonies
She is full sure! Upon her dying rose
She drops a look of fondness, and goes by,
Scarce any retrospection in her eye;
For she the laws of growth most deeply knows,
Whose hands bear, here, a seed-bag; there, an urn.
Pledged she herself to aught, ’twould mark her end!
This lesson of our only visible friend,
Can we not teach our foolish hearts to learn?
Yes! yes! — but oh, our human rose is fair
Surpassingly! Lose calmly Love’s great bliss,
When the renew’d forever of a kiss
Sounds thro’ the listless hurricane of hair!

XIV

WHAT soul would bargain for a cure that brings
Contempt the nobler agony to kill ?
Rather let me bear on the bitter ill,
And strike this rusty bosom with new stings !
It seems there is another veering fit,
Since on a gold-hair'd lady's eyeballs pure,
I look'd with little prospect of a cure,
The while her mouth's red bow loosed shafts of wit.
Just Heaven ! can it be true that jealousy
Has deck'd the woman thus ? and does her head
Whirl giddily for what she forfeited ?
Madam ! you teach me many things that be.
I open an old book, and there I find
That ' Women still may love whom they deceive.'
Such love I prize not, Madam : by your leave,
The game you play at is not to my mind.

XV

I THINK she sleeps : it must be sleep, when low
 Hangs that abandon'd arm towards the floor :
 The head turn'd with it. Now make fast the door.
 Sleep on : it is your husband, not your foe !
 The Poet's black stage-lion of wrong'd love,
 Frights not our modern dames : — well, if he did !
 Now will I pour new light upon that lid,
 Full-sloping like the breasts beneath. “Sweet dove,
 “Your sleep is pure. Nay, pardon : I disturb.
 “I do not ? well ! ” Her waking infant stare
 Grows woman to the burden my hands bear :
 Her own handwriting to me when no curb
 Was left on Passion's tongue. She trembles thro' ;
 A woman's tremble — the whole instrument : —
 I show another letter lately sent.
 The words are very like : the name is new.

XVI

IN our old shipwreck'd days there was an hour,
When in the firelight steadily aglow,
Join'd slackly, we beheld the chasm grow
Among the clicking coals. Our library-bower
That eve was left to us: and hush'd we sat
As lovers to whom Time is whispering.
From sudden-open'd doors we heard them sing:
The nodding elders mix'd good wine with chat.
Well knew we that Life's greatest treasure lay
With us, and of it was our talk. "Ah, yes!
"Love dies!" I said: I never thought it less.
She yearn'd to me that sentence to unsay.
Then when the fire domed blackening, I found
Her cheek was salt against my kiss, and swift
Up the sharp scale of sobs her breast did lift:—
Now am I haunted by that taste! that sound!

XVII

At dinner she is hostess, I am host.
Went the feast ever cheerfuller? She keeps
The Topic over intellectual deeps
In buoyancy afloat. They see no ghost.
With sparkling surface-eyes we ply the ball :
It is in truth a most contagious game ;
HIDING THE SKELETON shall be its name.
Such play as this the devils might appal !
But here's the greater wonder ; in that we,
Enamour'd of our acting and our wits,
Admire each other like true hypocrites.
Warm-lighted glances, Love's Ephemeræ,
Shoot gaily o'er the dishes and the wine.
We waken envy of our happy lot.
Fast, sweet, and golden, shows our marriage-knot.
Dear guests, you now have seen Love's corpse-light
shine !

XVIII

HERE Jack and Tom are pair'd with Moll and Meg.
Curved open to the river-reach is seen
A country merry-making on the green.
Fair space for signal shakings of the leg.
That little screwy fiddler from his booth,
Whence flows one nut-brown stream, commands the
 joints
Of all who caper here at various points.
I have known rustic revels in my youth :
The May-fly pleasures of a mind at ease.
An early goddess was a country lass :
A charm'd Amphion-oak she tripped the grass.
What life was that I lived ? The life of these ?
God keep them happy ! Nature they are near.
They must, I think, be wiser than I am :
They have the secret of the bull and lamb.
'Tis true that when we trace its source, 'tis beer.

XIX

NO state is enviable. To the luck alone
Of some few favour'd men I would put claim.
I bleed, but she who wounds I will not blame.
Have I not felt her heart as 'twere my own,
Beat thro' me? could I hurt her? Heaven and Hell!
But I could hurt her cruelly! Can I let
My Love's old time-piece to another set,
Swear it can't stop, and must for ever swell?
Sure, that's one way Love drifts into the mart
Where goat-legg'd buyers throng. I see not plain:—
My meaning is, it must not be again.
Great God! the maddest gambler throws his heart.
If any state be enviable on earth,
'Tis yon born idiot's, who, as days go by,
Still rubs his hands before him like a fly,
In a queer sort of meditative mirth.

XX

I AM not of those miserable males
Who sniff at vice, and, daring not to snap,
Do therefore hope for Heaven. I take the hap
Of all my deeds. The wind that fills my sails,
Propels; but I am helmsman. Am I wreck'd,
I know the devil has sufficient weight
To bear: I lay it not on him, or fate.
Besides, he's damn'd. That man I do suspect
A coward, who would burden the poor deuce
With what ensues from his own slipperiness.
I have just found a wanton-scented tress
In an old desk, dusty for lack of use.
Of days and nights it is demonstrative,
That like a blasted star gleam luridly.
If for that time I must ask charity,
Have I not any charity to give?

XXI

WE three are on the cedar-shadow'd lawn;
My friend being third. He who at love once
laugh'd,
Is in the weak rib by a fatal shaft
Struck through and tells his passion's bashful dawn,
And radiant culmination, glorious crown,
When 'this' she said : went 'thus : ' most wondrous she !
Our eyes grow white, encountering ; that we are three,
Forgetful ; then together we look down.
But he demands our blessing ; is convinced
That words of wedded lovers must bring good.
We question : if we dare ! or if we should !
And pat him, with light laugh. We have not winced.
Next, she has fallen. Fainting points the sign
To happy things in wedlock. When she wakes
She looks the star that thro' the cedar shakes :
Her lost moist hand clings mortally to mine.

XXII

WHAT may this woman labour to confess ?
There is about her mouth a nervous twitch.
'Tis something to be told, or hidden : — which ?
I get a glimpse of Hell in this mild guess.
She has desires of touch, as if to feel
That all the household things are things she knew.
She stops before the glass. What does she view ?
A face that seems the latest to reveal !
For she turns from it hastily, and toss'd
Irresolute, steals shadow-like to where
I stand ; and wavering pale before me there,
Her tears fall still as oak-leaves after frost.
She will not speak. I will not ask. We are
League-sunder'd by the silent gulf between.
You burly lovers on the village green,
Yours is a lower, but a happier star !

XXIII

Tis Christmas weather, and a country house
 Receives us : rooms are full : we can but get
 An attic-crib. Such lovers will not fret
 At that, it is half-said. The great carouse
 Knocks hard upon the midnight's hollow door.
 But when I knock at hers, I see the pit.
 Why did I come here in that dullard fit ?
 I enter, and lie couch'd upon the floor.
 Passing, I caught the coverlid's quick beat : —
 Come, Shame, burn to my soul ! and Pride, and Pain —
 Foul demons that have tortured me, sustain !
 Out in the freezing darkness the lambs bleat.
 The small bird stiffens in the low starlight.
 I know not how, but, shuddering as I slept,
 I dream'd a banish'd Angel to me crept :
 My feet were nourish'd on her breasts all night.

XXIV

THE misery is greater, as I live!
To know her flesh so pure, so keen her sense,
That she does penance now for no offence,
Save against Love. The less can I forgive!
The less can I forgive, though I adore
That cruel lovely pallor which surrounds
Her footsteps; and the low vibrating sounds
That come on me, as from a magic shore.
Low are they, but most subtle to find out
The shrinking soul. Madam, 'tis understood
When women play upon their womanhood.
It means, a Season gone. And yet I doubt
But I am duped. That nun-like look waylays
My fancy. Oh! I do but wait a sign!
Pluck out the eyes of Pride! thy mouth to mine!
Never! though I die thirsting. Go thy ways!

XXV

You like not that French novel? Tell me why.
 You think it most unnatural. Let us see.

The actors are, it seems, the usual three :
 Husband, and wife, and lover. She — but fie !
 In England we'll not hear of it. Edmond,
 The lover, her devout chagrin doth share ;
 Blanc-mange and absinthe are his penitent fare,
 Till his pale aspect makes her overfond :
 So, to preclude fresh sin, he tries rosbif.
 Meantime the husband is no more abused :
 Auguste forgives her ere the tear is used.
 Then hangeth all on one tremendous If :—
 If she will choose between them ! She does choose ;
 And takes her husband like a proper wife.
 Unnatural ? My dear, these things are life :
 And life, they say, is worthy of the Muse.

XXVI

LOVE ere he bleeds, an eagle in high skies,
Has earth beneath his wings: from reddened eve
He views the rosy dawn. In vain they weave
The fatal web below while far he flies.
But when the arrow strikes him, there's a change.
He moves but in the track of his spent pain,
Whose red drops are the links of a harsh chain,
Binding him to the ground with narrow range.
A subtle serpent then has Love become.
I had the eagle in my bosom erst.
Henceforward with the serpent I am curs'd.
I can interpret where the mouth is dumb.
Speak, and I see the side-lie of a truth.
Perchance my heart may pardon you this deed:
But be no coward:—you that made Love bleed,
You must bear all the venom of his tooth!

XXVII

DISTRACTION is the panacea, Sir!
 I hear my Oracle of Medicine say.
 Doctor! that same specific yesterday
 I tried, and the result will not deter
 A second trial. Is the devil's line
 Of golden hair, or raven black, composed?
 And does a cheek, like any sea-shell rosed,
 Or fair as widow'd Heaven, seem most divine?
 No matter, so I taste forgetfulness.
 And if the devil snare me, body and mind,
 Here gratefully I score:—he seem'd kind,
 When not a soul would comfort my distress!
 O sweet new world in which I rise new made!
 O Lady, once I gave love: now I take!
 Lady, I must be flatter'd. Shouldst thou wake
 The passion of a demon, be not afraid.

XXVIII

I MUST be flatter'd. The imperious
Desire speaks out. Lady, I am content
To play with you the game of Sentiment,
And with you enter on paths perilous :
But if across your beauty I throw light,
To make it threefold, it must be all mine.
First secret ; then avow'd. For I must shine
Envied, — I, lessen'd in my proper sight !
Be watchful of your beauty, Lady dear !
How much hangs on that lamp you cannot tell.
Most earnestly I pray you, tend it well :
And men shall see me like the burning sphere :
And men shall mark you eyeing me, and groan
To be the God of such a grand sunflower !
I feel the promptings of Satanic power,
While you do homage unto me alone.

XXIX

Am I failing? for no longer can I cast
A glory round about this head of gold.
Glory she wears, but springing from the mould:
Not like the consecration of the Past!
Is my soul beggar'd? Something more than earth
I cry for still: I cannot be at peace
In having Love upon a mortal lease.
I cannot take the woman at her worth!
Where is the ancient wealth wherewith I clothed
Our human nakedness, and could endow
With spiritual splendour a white brow
That else had grinn'd at me the fact I loath'd?
A kiss is but a kiss now! and no wave
Of a great flood that whirls me to the sea.
But, as you will! we'll sit contentedly,
And eat our pot of honey on the grave.

XXX

WHAT are we first? First, animals; and next,
Intelligences at a leap; on whom
Pale lies the distant shadow of the tomb,
And all that draweth on the tomb for text.
Into this state comes Love, the crowning sun :
Beneath whose light the shadow loses form.
We are the lords of life, and life is warm.
Intelligence and instinct now are one.
But Nature says: 'My children most they seem
When they least know me: therefore I decree
That they shall suffer.' Swift doth young Love flee :
And we stand waken'd, shivering from our dream.
Then if we study Nature we are wise.
Thus do the few who live but with the day.
The scientific animals are they. —
Lady, this is my Sonnet to your eyes.

XXXI

THIS golden head has wit in it. I live
 Again, and a far higher life, near her.
 Some women like a young philosopher;
 Perchance because he is diminutive.
 For woman's manly god must not exceed
 Proportions of the natural nursing size.
 Great poets and great sages draw no prize
 With women: but the little lap-dog breed,
 Who can be hugg'd, or on a mantel-piece
 Perch'd up for adoration, these obtain
 Her homage. And of this we men are vain?
 Of this! 'Tis order'd for the world's increase!
 Small flattery! Yet she has that rare gift
 To beauty, Common Sense. I am approved.
 It is not half so nice as being loved,
 And yet I do prefer it. What's my drift?

FULL faith I have she holds that rarest gift
 To beauty, Common Sense. To see her lie
 With her fair visage an inverted sky
 Bloom-cover'd, while the underlids uplift,
 Would almost wreck the faith; but when her mouth
 (Can it kiss sweetly? sweetly!) would address
 The inner me that thirsts for her no less, .
 And has so long been languishing in drouth,
 I feel that I am match'd: that I am man!
 One restless corner of my heart, or head,
 That holds a dying something never dead,
 Still frets, though Nature giveth all she can.
 It means, that woman is not, I opine,
 Her sex's antidote. Who seeks the asp
 For serpents' bites? 'Twould calm me could I clasp
 Shrieking Bacchantes with their souls of wine!

XXXIII

IN Paris, at the Louvre, there have I seen
 The sumptuously-feather'd angel pierce
 Prone Lucifer, descending. Look'd he fierce,
 Showing the fight a fair one? Too serene!
 The young Pharsalians did not disarray
 Less willingly their locks of floating silk:
 That suckling mouth o' his, upon the milk
 Of stars might still be feasting through the fray.
 Oh, Raphael! when men the Fiend do fight,
 They conquer not upon such easy terms.
 Half serpent in the struggle grow these worms.
 And does he grow half human, all is right.'
 This to my Lady in a distant spot,
 Upon the theme: '*While mind is mastering clay,*
Gross clay invades it.' If the spy you play,
 My wife, read this! Strange love-talk, is it not?

XXXIV

MADAM would speak with me. So, now it comes:
The Deluge, or else Fire! She's well; she thanks
My husbandship. Our chain through silence clanks.
Time leers between us, twiddling his thumbs.
Am I quite well? Most excellent in health!
The journals, too, I diligently peruse.
Vesuvius is expected to give news:
Niagara is no noisier. By stealth
Our eyes dart scrutinizing snakes. She's glad
I'm happy, says her quivering under-lip.
"And are not you?" "How can I be?" "Take ship!
"For happiness is somewhere to be had."
"Nowhere for me!" Her voice is barely heard.
I am not melted, and make no pretence.
With truisms I freeze her, tongue and sense.
Niagara, or Vesuvius, is deferr'd.

XXXV

It is no vulgar nature I have wived.
 Secretive, sensitive, she takes a wound
 Deep to her soul, as if the sense had swoon'd,
 And not a thought of vengeance had survived.
 No confidences has she : but relief
 Must come to one whose suffering is acute.
 O have a care of natures that are mute !
 They punish you in acts : their steps are brief.
 What is she doing ? What does she demand
 From Providence, or me ? She is not one
 Long to endure this torpidly, and shun
 The drugs that crowd about a woman's hand.
 At Forfeits during snow we play'd, and I
 Must kiss her. " Well perform'd ! " I said : then she :
 " 'Tis hardly worth the money, you agree ? "
 Save her ? What for ? To act this wedded lie !

XXXVI

My Lady unto Madam makes her bow.
 The charm of women is, that even while
 You're probed by them for tears, you yet may smile,
 Nay, laugh outright, as I have done just now.
 The interview was gracious: they anoint
 (To me aside) each other with fine praise:
 Discriminating compliments they raise,
 That hit with wondrous aim on the weak point.
 My Lady's nose of nature might complain.
 It is not fashion'd aptly to express
 Her character of large-brow'd stedfastness.
 But Madam says: Thereof she may be vain!
 Now, Madam's faulty feature is a glazed
 And inaccessible eye, that has soft fires,
 Wide gates, at love-time only. This admires
 My Lady. At the two I stand amazed.

XXXVII

A LONG the garden terrace, under which
A purple valley (lighted at its edge
By smoky torch-flame on the long cloud-ledge
Whereunder dropp'd the chariot), glimmers rich,
A quiet company we pace, and wait
The dinner-bell in pre-digestive calm.
So sweet up violet banks the Southern balm
Breathes round, we care not if the bell be late:
Tho' here and there gray seniors question Time
In irritable coughings. With slow foot
The low, rosed moon, the face of Music mute,
Begins among her silent bars to climb.
As in and out, in silvery dusk, we thread,
I hear the laugh of Madam, and discern
My Lady's heel before me at each turn.
Our Tragedy, is it alive or dead?

XXXVIII

GIVE to imagination some pure light
In human form to fix it, or you shame
The devils with that hideous human game: —
Imagination urging appetite!
Thus fallen have earth's greatest Gogmagogs,
Who dazzle us, whom we cannot revere.
Imagination is the charioteer
That, in default of better, drives the hogs.
So, therefore, my dear Lady, let me love!
My soul is arrow'd to the light in you.
You know me that I never can renew
The bond that woman broke: what would you have?
'Tis Love, or Vileness! not a choice between,
Save petrification! What does Pity here?
She kill'd a thing, and now it's dead, 'tis dear.
O, when you counsel me, think what you mean!

XXXIX

SHE yields : my Lady in her noblest mood
 Has yielded: she, my golden-crown'd rose!
 The bride of every sense! more sweet than those
 Who breathe the violet breath of maidenhood.
 O visage of still music in the sky!
 Soft moon! I feel thy song, my fairest friend!
 True harmony within can apprehend
 Dumb harmony without. And hark! 'tis nigh!
 Belief has struck the note of sound: a gleam
 Of living silver shows me where she shook
 Her long white fingers down the shadowy brook,
 That sings her song, half waking, half in dream.
 What two come here to mar this heavenly tune?
 A man is one: the woman bears my name,
 And honour. Their hands touch! Am I still tame?
 God, what a dancing spectre seems the moon!

XL

I BADE my Lady think what she might mean.
 Know I my meaning, /? Can I love one,
 And yet be jealous of another? None
 Commit such folly. Terrible Love, I ween,
 Has might, even dead, half sighing to upheave
 The lightless seas of selfishness amain :
 Seas that in a man's heart have no rain
 To fall and still them. Peace can I achieve
 By turning to this fountain-source of woe,
 This woman, who 's to Love as fire to wood ?
 She breath'd the violet breath of maidenhood
 Against my kisses once! but I say, No!
 The thing is mock'd at! Helplessly afloat,
 I know not what I do, whereto I strive.
 The dread that my old love may be alive,
 Has seiz'd my nursling new love by the throat.

XLI

How many a thing which we cast to the ground,
When others pick it up becomes a gem !
We grasp at all the wealth it is to them ;
And by reflected light its worth is found.
Yet for us still 'tis nothing ! and that zeal
Of false appreciation quickly fades.
This truth is little known to human shades,
How rare from their own instinct 'tis to feel !
They waste the soul with spurious desire,
That is not the ripe flame upon the bough :
We two have taken up a lifeless vow
To rob a living passion : dust for fire !
Madam is grave, and eyes the clock that tells
Approaching midnight. We have struck despair
Into two hearts. O, look we like a pair
Who for fresh nuptials joyfully yield all else ?

XLII

I AM to follow her. There is much grace
In women when thus bent on martyrdom.
They think that dignity of soul may come,
Perchance, with dignity of body. Base!
But I was taken by that air of cold
And statuesque sedateness, when she said,
"I'm going;" lit the taper, bow'd her head,
And went, as with the stride of Pallas bold.
Fleshly indifference horrible! The hands
Of Time now signal: O, she's safe from me!
Within those secret walls what do I see?
Where first she set the taper down she stands:
Not Pallas: Hebe shamed! Thoughts black as death,
Like a stirr'd pool in sunshine break. Her wrists
I catch: she faltering, as she half resists,
"You love . . . ? love . . . ? love . . . ?" all in an
indrawn breath.

XLIII

MARK where the pressing wind shoots javelin-like,
Its skeleton shadow on the broad-back'd wave !
Here is a fitting spot to dig Love's grave ;
Here where the ponderous breakers plunge and strike,
And dart their hissing tongues high up the sand :
In hearing of the ocean, and in sight
Of those ribb'd wind-streaks running into white.
If I the death of Love had deeply plann'd,
I never could have made it half so sure,
As by the unblest'd kisses which upbraid
The full-waked sense ; or, failing that, degrade !
'Tis morning : but no morning can restore
What we have forfeited. I see no sin :
The wrong is mix'd. In tragic life, God wot,
No villain need be ! Passions spin the plot :
We are betray'd by what is false within.

XLIV

THEY say that Pity in Love's service dwells,
 A porter at the rosy temple's gate.
 I miss'd him going: but it is my fate
 To come upon him now beside his wells;
 Whereby I know that I Love's temple leave,
 And that the purple doors have closed behind.
 Poor soul! if in those early days unkind,
 Thy power to sting had been but power to grieve,
 We now might with an equal spirit meet,
 And not be match'd like innocence and vice.
 She for the Temple's worship has paid price,
 And takes the coin of Pity as a cheat.
 She sees thro' simulation to the bone:
 What 's best in her impels her to the worst.
 Never, she cries, shall Pity soothe Love's thirst,
 Or foul hypocrisy for truth atone!

XLV

IT is the season of the sweet wild rose,
My Lady's emblem in the heart of me!
So golden-crown'd shines she gloriously,
And with that softest dream of blood she glows:
Mild as an evening Heaven round Hesper bright!
I pluck the flower, and smell it, and revive
The time when in her eyes I stood alive.
I seem to look upon it out of Night.
Here's Madam, stepping hastily. Her whims
Bid her demand the flower, which I let drop.
As I proceed, I feel her sharply stop,
And crush it under heel with trembling limbs.
She joins me in a cat-like way, and talks
Of company, and even condescends
To utter laughing scandal of old friends.
These are the summer days, and these our walks.

XLVI

AT last we parley : we so strangely dumb
In such a close communion ! It befell
About the sounding of the *Matin*-bell,
And lo ! her place was vacant, and the hum
Of loneliness was round me. Then I rose,
And my disorder'd brain did guide my foot
To that old wood where our first love-salute
Was interchanged : the source of many throes !
There did I see her, not alone. I moved
Towards her, and made proffer of my arm.
She took it simply, with no rude alarm ;
And that disturbing shadow pass'd reprov'd.
I felt the pain'd speech coming, and declared
My firm belief in her, ere she could speak.
A ghastly morning came into her cheek,
While with a widening soul on me she stared.

XLVII

WE saw the swallows gathering in the sky,
And in the osier-isle we heard their noise.
We had not to look back on summer joys,
Or forward to a summer of bright dye.
But in the largeness of the evening earth
Our spirits grew as we went side by side.
The hour became her husband, and my bride.
Love that had robb'd us so, thus bless'd our dearth !
The pilgrims of the year wax'd very loud
In multitudinous chatterings, as the flood
Full brown came from the west, and like pale blood
Expanded to the upper crimson cloud.
Love that had robb'd us of immortal things,
This little moment mercifully gave,
And still I see across the twilight wave,
The swan sail with her young beneath her wings.

XLVIII

THEIR sense is with their senses all mix'd in.
Destroy'd by subtleties these women are!
More brain, O Lord, more brain! or we shall mar
Utterly this fair garden we might win.
Behold! I looked for peace, and thought it near.
Our inmost hearts had open'd, each to each.
We drank the pure daylight of honest speech.
Alas! that was the fatal draught, I fear.
For when of my 'lost Lady came the word,
This woman, O this agony of flesh!
Jealous devotion bade her break the mesh,
That I might seek that other like a bird.
I do adore the nobleness! despise
The act! She has gone forth, I know not where.
Will the hard world my sentence of her share?
I feel the truth; so let the world surmise.

XLIX

H e found her by the ocean's moaning verge,
Nor any wicked change in her discern'd;
And she believed his old love had return'd,
Which was her exultation, and her scourge.
She took his hand, and walked with him, and seem'd
The wife he sought, tho' shadowlike and dry.
She had one terror, lest her heart should sigh,
And tell her loudly she no longer dream'd.
She dared not say, "This is my breast: look in."
But there's a strength to help the desperate weak.
That night he learnt how silence best can speak
The awful things when Pity pleads for Sin.
About the middle of the night her call
Was heard, and he came wondering to the bed.
"Now kiss me, dear! it may be, now!" she said.
Lethe had pass'd those lips, and he knew all.

L

THUS piteously Love closed what he begat:
 The union of this ever-diverse pair!
 These two were rapid falcons in a snare,
 Condemn'd to do the fitting of the bat.
 Lovers beneath the singing sky of May,
 They wander'd once; clear as the dew on flowers:
 But they fed not on the advancing hours:
 Their hearts held cravings for the buried day.
 Then each applied to each that fatal knife,
 Deep questioning, which probes to endless dole.
 Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul
 When hot for certainties in this our life! —
 In tragic hints here see what evermore
 Moves dark as yonder midnight ocean's force,
 Thundering like ramping hosts of warrior horse,
 To throw that faint thin line upon the shore!



OTHER POEMS





THE MEETING

THE old coach-road thro' a common of furze,
With knolls of pines, ran white :
Berries of autumn, with thistles, and burrs,
And spider-threads, droop'd in the light.

The light in a thin blue veil peer'd sick ;
The sheep grazed close and still ;
The smoke of a farm by a yellow rick
Curl'd lazily under a hill.

No fly shook the round of the silver net ;
No insect the swift bird chased ;
Only two travellers moved and met
Across that hazy waste.

One was a girl with a babe that throve,
Her ruin and her bliss ;
One was a youth with a lawless love,
Who claspt it the more for this.

The girl for her babe humm'd prayerful speech ;
The youth for his love did pray ;
Each cast a wistful look on each,
And either went their way.

SOUTH-WEST WIND IN THE WOODLAND

THE silence of preluded song —
Æolian silence charms the woods ;
Each tree a harp, whose foliaged strings
Are waiting for the master's touch
To sweep them into streams of joy,
Stands mute and whispers not ; the birds
Brood dumb in their foreboding nests,
Save here and there a chirp or tweet,
That utters fear or anxious love,
Or when the ouzel sends a swift
Half warble, shrinking back again
His golden bill, or when aloud
The storm-cock warns the dusking hills
And villages and valleys round :
For lo ! beneath those ragged clouds
That skirt the opening west, a stream
Of yellow light and windy flame
Spreads lengthening southward, and the sky
Begins to gloom, and o'er the ground
A moan of coming blasts creeps low
And rustles in the crisping grass ;
Till suddenly with mighty arms
Outspread, that reach the horizon round,
The great South-West drives o'er the earth,
And loosens all his roaring robes
Behind him, over heath and moor.
He comes upon the neck of night,
Like one that leaps a fiery steed

Whose keen black haunches quivering shine
With eagerness and haste, that needs
No spur to make the dark leagues fly !
Whose eyes are meteors of speed ;
Whose mane is as a flashing foam ;
Whose hoofs are travelling thunder-shocks ; —
He comes, and while his growing gusts,
Wild couriers of his reckless course —
Are whistling from the daggered gorse,
And hurrying over fern and broom,
Midway, far off, he feigns to halt
And gather in his steaming train.

Now, whirring like an eagle's wing
Preparing for a wide blue flight, —
Now, flapping like a sail that tacks
And chides the wet bewildered mast,
Now, screaming like an anguish'd thing
Chased close by some down-breathing beak,
Now, wailing like a breaking heart,
That will not wholly break, but hopes
With hope that knows itself in vain ;
Now, threatening like a storm-charged cloud,
Now, cooing like a woodland dove,
Now, up again in roar and wrath
High soaring and wide sweeping, now
With sudden fury dashing down
Full-force on the awaiting woods.

Long waited there, for aspens frail
That tinkle with a silver bell,
To warn the Zephyr of their love,

When danger is at hand, and wake
The neighbouring boughs, surrendering all
Their prophet harmony of leaves,
Had caught his earliest windward thought,
And told it trembling; naked birk
Down showering her dishevell'd hair,
And like a beauty yielding up
Her fate to all the elements,
Had sway'd in answer; hazels close,
Thick brambles and dark brushwood tufts,
And briar'd brakes that line the dells
With shaggy beetling brows, had sung
Shrill music, while the tattered flaws
Tore over them, and now the whole
Tumultuous concords seized at once
With savage inspiration, — pine,
And larch, and beech, and fir, and thorn,
And ash, and oak, and oakling, rave
And shriek, and shout, and whirl, and toss,
And stretch their arms, and split, and crack,
And bend their stems, and bow their heads,
And grind, and groan, and lion-like
Roar to the echo peopled hills
And ravenous wilds, and crake-like cry
With harsh delight, and cave-like call
With hollow mouth, and harp-like thrill
With mighty melodies, sublime,
From clumps of column'd pines that wave
A lofty anthem to the sky,
Fit music for a prophet's soul —
And like an ocean gathering power,

And murmuring deep, while down below,
Reigns calm profound;— not trembling now
The aspens, but like freshening waves
That fall upon a shingly beach;—
And round the oak a solemn roll
Of organ harmony ascends,
And in the upper foliage sounds
A symphony of distant seas.

The voice of nature is abroad
This night; she fills the air with balm;
Her mystery is o'er the land;
And who that hears her now and yields
His being to her yearning tones,
And seats his soul upon her wings,
And broadens o'er the wind-swept world
With her, will gather in the flight
More knowledge of her secret, more
Delight in her beneficence,
Than hours of musing, or the love
That lives with men could ever give!
Nor will it pass away when morn
Shall look upon the lulling leaves,
And woodland sunshine, Eden-sweet,
Dreams o'er the paths of peaceful shade;—
For every elemental power
Is kindred to our hearts, and once
Acknowledged, wedded, once embraced,
Once taken to the unfettered sense,
Once claspt into the naked life,
The union is eternal.

PASTORALS

I

HOW sweet on sunny afternoons,
For those who journey light and well,
To loiter up a hilly rise
Which hides the prospect far beyond,
And fancy all the landscape lying
Beautiful and still.

Beneath a sky of summer blue,
Whose rounded cloudlets, folded soft,
Gaze on the scene which we await
And picture from their peacefulness ;
So calmly to the earth inclining
Float those loving shapes !

Like airy brides, each singling out
A spot to love and bless with love
Their creamy bosoms glowing warm,
Till distance weds them to the hills,
And with its latest gleams the river
Sinks in their embrace.

And silverly the river runs,
And many a graceful wind he makes,
By fields where feed the happy flocks,
And hedge-rows hushing pleasant lanes,
The charms of English home reflected
In his shining eye !

Ancestral oak, broad foliaged elm,
Rich meadows sunn'd and starr'd with flowers,
The cottage breathing tender smoke
Against the brooding golden air,
With glimpses of a stately mansion
On a woodland sward !

And circling round as with a ring,
The distance spreading amber haze,
Enclosing hills and pastures sweet ;
A depth of soft and mellow light
Which fills the heart with sudden yearning
Aimless and serene !

No disenchantment follows here,
For nature's inspiration moves
The dream which she herself fulfils ;
And he whose heart like valley warmth,
Steams up with joy at scenes like this
Shall never be forlorn.

And O for any human soul
The rapture of a wide survey —
A valley sweeping to the west
With all its wealth of loveliness,
Is more than recompense for days
That taught us to endure.

II

YON upland slope which hides the sun
Ascending from his eastern deeps,
And now against the hues of dawn,
One level line of tillage rears ;
The furrowed brow of toil and time ;
To many it is but a sweep of land !

To others 'tis an Autumn trust,
But unto me a mystery ; —
An influence strange and swift as dreams ;
A whispering of old romance ;
A temple naked to the clouds ;
Or one of nature's bosoms fresh reveal'd

Heaving with adoration ! there
The work of husbandry is done,
And daily bread is daily earn'd ;
Nor seems there ought to indicate
The springs which move in me such thoughts,
But from my soul a spirit calls them up !

All day into the open sky,
All night to the eternal stars,
For ever both at morn and eve
When mellow distances draw near,
And shadows lengthen in the dusk,
Athwart the heavens it rolls its glimmering line !

When twilight from the dream-hued west
Sighs hush! and all the land is still:
When from the lush empurpling east,
The twilight of the crowing cock,
Peers on the drowsy village roofs,
Athwart the heavens that glimmering line is seen!

And now beneath the rising sun,
Whose shining chariot overpeers,
The irradiate ridge, while fetlock deep
In the rich soil his coursers plunge —
How grand in robes of light it looks!
How glorious with rare suggestive grace!

The ploughman mounting up the height
Becomes a glowing shape, as though
'Twere young Triptolemus, plough in hand,
While Ceres in her amber scarf,
With gentle love directs him how
To wed the willing earth and hope for fruits!

The furrows running up, are fraught
With meanings; there the goddess walks,
While Proserpine is young, and there —
'Mid the late autumn sheaves, her voice
Sobbing and choked with dumb despair —
The nights will hear her wailing for her child.

Whatever dim tradition tells,
Whatever history may reveal,
Or fancy, from her starry brows,

Of light or dreamful lustre shed,
Could not at this sweet time increase
The quiet consecration of the spot!

Blest with the sweat of labour, blest
With the young sun's first vigorous beams,
Village hope and harvest prayer, —
The heart that throbs beneath it, holds
A bliss so perfect in itself
Men's thoughts must borrow rather than bestow.

III

Now standing on this hedgeside path,
Up which the evening winds are blowing
Wildly from the lingering lines
Of sunset o'er the hills;
Unaided by one motive thought,
My spirit with a strange impulsion
Rises, like a fledgling,
Whose wings are not mature, but still
Supported by its strong desire,
Beats up its native air and leaves
The tender mother's nest.

Great musick under heaven is made,
And in the track of rushing darkness
Comes the solemn shape of night,
And broods above the earth.
A thing of Nature am I now,
Abroad, without a sense or feeling
Born not of her bosom;
Content with all her truths and fates;
Ev'n as yon strip of grass that bows
Above the new-born violet bloom,
And sings with wood and field.

IV

Lo! as a tree, whose wintry twigs
Drink in the sun with fibrous joy,
And down into its dampest roots
Thrills quickened with the draught of life,
I wake unto the dawn, and leave my griefs to drowse.

I rise and drink the fresh sweet air !
Each draft a future bud of spring ;
Each glance of blue a birth of green ;
I will not mimic yonder oak
That dallies with dead leaves ev'n while the primrose
 peeps !

But full of these warm-whispering beams,
Like Memnon in his mother's eye, —
Aurora ! when the statue stone
Moan'd soft to her pathetic touch, —
My soul shall own its parent in the founts of day !

And ever in the recurring light,
True to the primal joy of dawn,
Forget its barren griefs ; and aye
Like aspens in the faintest breeze,
Turn all its silver sides and trembles into song.

Now from the meadow floods the wild duck clamours,
 Now the wood pigeon wings a rapid flight,
 Now the homeward rookery follows up its vanguard,
 And the valley mists are curling up the hills.

Three short songs gives the clear voiced thristle,
 Sweetening the twilight ere he fills the nest;
 While the little bird upon the leafless branches
 Tweets to its mate a tiny loving note.

Deeper the stillness hangs on every motion;
 Calmer the silence follows every call:
 Now all is quiet save the roosting pheasant,
 The bell-wether tinkle and the watch dog's bark.

Softly shine the lights from the silent kindling home-
 stead,
 Stars of the hearth to the shepherd in the fold;
 Springs of desire to the traveller on the roadway;
 Ever breathing incense to the ever-blessing sky!

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VI

How barren would this valley be,
Without the golden orb that gazes
On it broadening to hues
Of rose, and spreading wings of amber ;
Blessing it before it falls asleep.

How barren would this valley be,
Without the human lives now beating
In it, or the throbbing hearts
Far distant, who their flower of childhood
Cherish here, and water it with tears !

How barren should I be, were I
Without above that loving splendour,
Shedding light and warmth ! without
Some kindred natures of my kind
To joy in me, or yearn towards me now !

VII

SUMMER glows warm on the meadows, and speedwell,
and goldcups, and daisies
Darken 'mid deepening masses of sorrel, and shadowy
grasses
Show the ripe hue to the farmer, and summon the
scythe and the haymakers
Down from the village; and now, even now, the air
smells of the mowing,
And the sharp song of the scythe whistles daily; from
dawn, till the gloaming
Wears its cool star; sweet and welcome to all flaming
faces a-field now;
Besprinkled with labour, and with the pure brew of the
malt right cheery!
Heavily weighs the hot season, and drowns the
darkening foliage,
Drooping with languor; the white cloud floats, but
sails not, for windless
The blue heaven tents it, no lark singing up in its
fleecy white valleys;
Up in its fairy white valleys, once feathered with
minstrels; melodious
With the invisible joy that wakes dawn o'er the green
fields of England.
Summer glows warm on the meadows; then come, let
us roam thro' them gaily,
Heedless of heat, and the hot kissing sun, and the fear
of dark freckles;

For never one kiss will he give on the neck, or a lily-
white forehead,
Chin, hand, or fair bosom uncover'd, all panting, to
take the chance coolness, —
But surely the hot fiery pressure shall leave its brown
seal of espousal.
Still heed him not; come, tho' he kiss till the soft
little upper-lip loses
Half its pure whiteness; just speck'd where the curve
of the rosy mouth reddens.

Come, let him kiss, let him kiss, and his kisses shall
make thee the sweeter.
Thou art no nun, veil'd and vow'd; doom'd to nourish
a withering pallor!
City exotics beside thee would show like bleach'd linen
at mid-day,
Hung upon hedges of eglantine! thou in the freedom
of nature,
Full of her beauty and wisdom, gentleness, joyance,
and kindliness!

Come, and like bees will we gather the rich golden
honey of noontide;
Deep in the sweet summer meadows, border'd by
hill-side and river;
Lined with long trenches half-hidden, where, sweetest,
the smell of white meadow-sweet
Blissfully hovers — O sweetest! but pluck it not! even
in the tenderest
Grasp it will lose breath and wither; like many, not
made for a posy.

See the sun slopes down the meadows, where all the
flowers are falling!
Falling unhymn'd; for the nightingale scarce ever
charms the long twilight:
Mute with the cares of the nest; only known by a
"chuck, chuck," and dovelike
Low call of content, but the finch and the linnet and
blackcap pipe loudly,
From elms round the western hill-side warbles the
rich-bill'd ouzel;
And the shrill throistle is filling the dusky thickening
copses;
Singing o'er hyacinths hid, and most honey'd of flowers
white field-rose.

O joy thus to revel all day in the grass of our own
beloved country;
Revel all day, till the lark mounts at eve with his
sweet "tirra-lirra;"
Trilling delightfully. See, on the river the slow
rippled surface
Shining; the slow ripple broadens in circles; the
bright surface smoothens;
Now it is flat as the leaves of the yet unseen water-lily,
There dart the lives of a day, ever-varying tactics
fantastic
There, by the wet-mirror'd osiers, the emerald wing of
the kingfisher
Flashes, the fish in his beak! there the dab-chick
dived, and the motion
Lazily undulates all thro' the tall standing army of
rushes.

Oh joy thus to revel all day, till the twilight turns us
homeward !
Till all the lingering deep-blooming splendour of sunset
is over,
And the one star shines mildly in mellowing hues, like
a spirit
Sent to assure us that light never dieth, tho' day is now
buried.

Saying ; to-morrow, to-morrow, few hours intervening ;
that interval
Tuned by the woodlark in heaven, to-morrow my sem-
blance, far eastward
Heralds the day 'tis my mission eternal, to seal and to
prophecy.

Come then, and homeward ; passing down the close
path of the meadows,
Home like the bees stored with sweetness ; each with
a lark in the bosom,
Trilling for ever, and oh ! will yon lark ever cease to
sing up there ?

VIII

SONG

SPRING

WHEN buds of palm do burst and spread
Their downy feathers in the lane,
And orchard blossoms, white and red
Breathe Spring delight and Autumn gain;
And the skylark shakes his wings in the rain;

Oh then is the season to look for a bride!
Choose her warily, woo her unseen;
For the choicest maids are those that hide
Like dewy violets under the green.

IX

SONG

AUTUMN

WHEN nuts behind the hazel leaf
Are brown as the squirrel that hunts them free,
And the fields are rich with the sun-burnt sheaf,
'Mid the blue cornflower and the yellowing tree;
And the farmer glows and beams with glee;

O then is the season to wed thee a bride!
Ere the garners are filled and the ale-cups foam,
For a smiling hostess is the pride
And flower of every Harvest Home.

X

LOVE IN THE VALLEY

UNDER yonder beech-tree standing on the green
sward,
Couch'd with her arms behind her little head,
Her knees folded up, and her tresses on her bosom,
Lies my young love sleeping in the shade.
Had I the heart to slide one arm beneath her!
Press her dreaming lips as her waist I folded slow,
Waking on the instant she could not but embrace me —
Ah! would she hold me, and never let me go?

Shy as the squirrel, and wayward as the swallow;
Swift as the swallow when athwart the western flood
Circling the surface he meets his mirror'd winglets, —
Is that dear one in her maiden bud.
Shy as the squirrel whose nest is in the pine tops;
Gentle — ah! that she were jealous as the dove!
Full of all the wildness of the woodland creatures,
Happy in herself is the maiden that I love!

What can have taught her distrust of all I tell her?
Can she truly doubt me when looking on my brows?
Nature never teaches distrust of tender love tales,
What can have taught her distrust of all my vows?
No she does not doubt me! on a dewy eve-tide
Whispering together beneath the listening moon,
I pray'd till her cheek flush'd, implored till she faltered —
Fluttered to my bosom — ah! to fly away so soon!

When her mother tends her before the laughing mirror,
Tying up her laces, looping up her hair,
Often she thinks — were this wild thing wedded,
I should have more love, and much less care.
When her mother tends her, before the bashful mirror,
Loosening her laces, combing down her curls,
Often she thinks — were this wild thing wedded,
I should lose but one for so many boys and girls.

Clambering roses peep into her chamber,
Jasmine and woodbine, breathe sweet, sweet,
White necked swallows twittering of summer,
Fill her with balm and nested peace from head to feet.
Ah! will the rose-bough see her lying lonely
When the petals fall and fierce bloom is on the leaves?
Will the Autumn garner see her still ungathered
When the fickle swallows forsake the weeping eaves?

Comes a sudden question — should a strange hand
pluck her!
Oh! what an anguish smites me at the thought,
Should some idle lordling bribe her mind with jewels! —
Can such beauty ever thus be bought?
Sometimes the huntsmen prancing down the valley
Eye the village lasses, full of sprightly mirth;
They see as I see, mine is the fairest!
Would she were older and could read my worth!

Are there not sweet maidens if she still deny me?
Show the bridal Heavens but one star?
Wherefore thus then do I chase a shadow,
Clattering one note like a brown eve-jar?

So I rhyme and reason till she darts before me —
Thro' the milky meadows from flower to flower she
flies,
Sunning her sweet palms to shade her dazzled eyelids
From the golden love that looks too eager in her eyes.

When at dawn she wakens, and her fair face gazes
Out on the weather thro' the window panes,
Beauteous she looks! like a white water-lily
Bursting out of bud on the rippled river plains,
When from bed she rises clothed from neck to ankle
In her long nightgown sweet as boughs of May,
Beauteous she looks! like a tall garden lily
Pure from the night and perfect for the day!

Happy, happy time, when the grey star twinkles
Over the fields all fresh with bloomy dew;
When the cold-cheek'd dawn grows ruddy up the
twilight,
And the gold sun wakes, and weds her in the blue.
Then when my darling tempts the early breezes,
She the only star that dies not with the dark!
Powerless to speak all the ardour of my passion
I catch her little hand as we listen to the lark.

Shall the birds in vain then valentine their sweethearts?
Season after season tell a fruitless tale;
Will not the virgin listen to their voices?
Take the honey'd meaning, wear the bridal veil.
Fears she frosts of winter, fears she the bare branches?
Waits she the garlands of Spring for her dower?
Is she a nightingale that will not be nested
Till the April woodland has built her bridal bower?

Then come merry April with all thy birds and beauties !
With thy crescent brows and thy flowery, showery
glee ;
With thy budding leafage and fresh green pastures ;
And may thy lustrous crescent grow a honeymoon
for me !
Come merry month of cuckoo and the violet !
Come weeping Loveliness in all thy blue delight !
Lo ! the nest is ready, let me not languish longer !
Bring her to my arms on the first May night.

THE WOODS OF WESTERMAIN

I

ENTER these enchanted woods,
You who dare.
Nothing harms beneath the leaves
More than waves a swimmer cleaves.
Toss your heart up with the lark,
Foot at peace with mouse and worm,
Fair you fare.
Only at a dread of dark
Quaver, and they quit their form :
Thousand eyeballs under hoods
Have you by the hair.
Enter these enchanted woods,
You who dare.

II

Here the snake across your path
Stretches in his golden bath :
Mossy-footed squirrels leap
Soft as winnowing plumes of Sleep :
Yaffles on a chuckle skim
Low to laugh from branches dim :
Up the pine, where sits the star,
Rattles deep the moth-winged jar.

Each has business of his own ;
But should you distrust a tone,
 Then beware.
Shudder all the haunted roods,
All the eyeballs under hoods
 Shroud you in their glare.
Enter these enchanted woods,
 You who dare.

III

Open hither, open hence,
Scarce a bramble weaves a fence,
Where the strawberry runs red,
With white star-flower overhead ;
Cumbered by dry twig and cone,
Shredded husks of seedlings flown,
Mine of mole and spotted flint :
Of dire wizardry no hint,
Save mayhap the print that shows
Hasty outward-tripping toes,
Heels to terror, on the mould.
These, the woods of Westermains,
Are as others to behold,
Rich of wreathing sun and rain ;
Foliage lustreful around
Shadowed leagues of slumbering sound.
Wavy tree-tops, yellow whins,
Shelter eager minikins,
Myriads, free to peck and pipe :
Would you better? would you worse?

You with them may gather ripe
Pleasures flowing not from purse.
Quick and far as Colour flies
Taking the delighted eyes,
You of any well that springs
May unfold the heaven of things ;
Have it homely and within,
And thereof its likeness win,
Will you so in soul's desire :
This do sages grant t' the lyre.
This is being bird and more,
More than glad musician this ;
Granaries you will have a store
Past the world of woe and bliss ;
Sharing still its bliss and woe ;
Harnessed to its hungers, no.
On the throne Success usurps,
You shall seat the joy you feel
Where a race of water chirps,
Twisting hues of flourished steel :
Or where light is caught in hoop
Up a clearing's leafy rise,
Where the crossing deerherds troop
Classic splendours, knightly dyes.
Or, where old-eyed oxen chew
Speculation with the cud,
Read their pool of vision through,
Back to hours when mind was mud ;
Nigh the knot, which did untwine
Timelessly to drowsy suns ;
Seeing Earth a slimy spine,
Heaven a space for winging tons.

Growths of what they step on, these ;
With the roots the grace of trees.
Casket-breasts they give, nor hide,
For a tyrant's flattered pride,
Mind, which nourished not by light,
Lurks the shuffling trickster sprite :
Whereof are strange tales to tell ;
Some in blood writ, tombed in bell.
Here the ancient battle ends,
Joining two astonished friends,
Who the kiss can give and take
With more warmth than in that world
Where the tiger claws the snake,
Snake her tiger clasps infurled,
And the issue of their fight
Peoples lands in snarling plight.
Here her splendid beast she leads
Silken-leashed and decked with weeds
Wild as he, but breathing faint
Sweetness of unfelt constraint.
Love, the great volcano, flings
Fires of lower Earth to sky ;
Love, the sole permitted, sings
Sovereignly of *ME* and *I*.
Bowers he has of sacred shade,
Spaces of superb parade,
Voiceful . . . But bring you a note
Wrangling, howsoe'er remote,
Discords out of discord spin
Round and round derisive din :
Sudden will a pallor pant
Chill at screeches miscreant ;

Owls or spectres, thick they flee ;
Nightmare upon horror broods ;
Hooded laughter, monkish glee,
 Gaps the vital air.
Enter these enchanted woods
 You who dare.

IV

You must love the light so well
That no darkness will seem fell.
Love it so you could accost
Fellowly a livid ghost.
Whish ! the phantom wisps away,
Owns him smoke to cocks of day.
In your breast the light must burn
Fed of you, like corn in quern
Ever plumping while the wheel
Speeds the mill and drains the meal.
Light to light sees little strange,
Only features heavenly new ;
Then you touch the nerve of Change,
Then of Earth you have the clue ;
Then her two-sexed meanings melt
Through you, wed the thought and felt
Sameness locks no scurfy pond
Here for Custom, crazy-fond :
Change is on the wing to bud
Rose in brain from rose in blood.
Wisdom throbbing shall you see
Central in complexity ;

From her pasture 'mid the beasts
Rise to her ethereal feasts,
Not, though lightnings track your wit
Starward, scorning them you quit :
For be sure the bravest wing
Preen's it in our common spring,
Thence along the vault to soar,
You with others, gathering more,
Glad of more, till you reject
Your proud title of elect,
Perilous even here, while few
Roam the arched greenwood with you.

Heed that snare.

Muffled by his cavern-cowl
Squats the scaly Dragon-fowl,
Who was lord ere light you drank,
And lest blood of knightly rank
Stream, let not your fair princess
Stray: he holds the leagues in stress,
Watches keenly there.

Oft has he been riven; slain
Is no force in Westermain.
Wait, and we shall forge him curbs,
Put his fangs to uses, tame,
Teach him, quick as cunning herbs,
How to cure him sick and lame.
Much restricted, much enringed,
Much he frets, the hooked and winged,

Never known to spare.

'Tis enough: the name of Sage
Hits no thing in nature, nought;

Man the least, save when grave Age
From yon Dragon guards his thought.
Eye him when you hearken dumb
To what words from Wisdom come
When she says how few are by
Listening to her, eye his eye.
Him shall Change, transforming late,
Wonderously renovate.
Hug himself the creature may :
What he hugs is loathed decay.
Crying, slip thy scales, and slough !
Change will strip his armour off ;
Make of him who was all maw,
Inly only thrilling-shrewd,
Such a servant as none saw
Through his days of dragonhood.
Days when growling o'er his bone,
Sharpened he for mine and thine ;
Sensitive within alone ;
Scaly as in clefts of pine.
Change, the strongest son of Life,
Has the Spirit here to wife.
Lo, their young of vivid breed,
Bear the lights that onward speed,
Threading thickets, mounting glades,
Up the verdurous colonnades,
Round the fluttered curves, and down,
Out of sight of Earth's blue crown,
Whither, in her central space,
Spouts the Fount and Lure o' the chase.
Fount unresting, Lure divine !
There meet all : too late look most.

Fire in water hued as wine,
Springs amid a shadowy host ;
Circled : one close-headed mob,
Breathless, scanning divers heaps
Where a Heart begins to throb,
Where it ceases, slow, with leaps.
And 'tis very strange, 'tis said,
How you spy in each of them
Semblance of that Dragon red,
As the oak in bracken-stem.
And, 'tis said, how each and each :
Which commences, which subsides :
First my Dragon ! doth beseech
Her who food for all provides.
And she answers with no sign ;
Utters neither yea nor nay ;
Fires the water hued as wine ;
Kneads another spark in clay.
Terror is about her hid ;
Silence of the thunders locked ;
Lightnings lining the shut lid ;
Fixity on quaking rocked.
Lo, you look at Flow and Drought
Interflashed and interwrought :
Ended is begun, begun
Ended, quick as torrents run.
Young Impulsion spouts to sink ;
Luridness and lustre link ;
'Tis your come and go of breath ;
Mirrored pants the Life, the Death ;
Each of either reaped and sown :
Rosiest rosy wanes to crone.

See you so? your senses drift;
'Tis a shuttle weaving swift.
Look with spirit past the sense,
Spirit shines in permanence.
That is She, the view of whom
Is the dust within the tomb,
Is the inner blush above,
Look to loathe, or look to love;
Think her Lump, or know her Flame;
Dread her scourge, or read her aim;
Shoot your hungers from their nerve;
Or, in her example, serve.
Some have found her sitting grave;
Laughing, some; or, browed with sweat,
Hurling dust of fool and knave
In a hissing smithy's jet.
More it were not well to speak;
Burn to see, you need but seek.
Once beheld she gives the key
Airing every doorway, she.
Little can you stop or steer
Ere of her you are the seer.
On the surface she will witch,
Rendering Beauty yours, but gaze
Under, and the soul is rich
Past computing, past amaze.
Then is courage that endures
Even her awful tremble yours.
Then, the reflex of that Fount
Spied below, with Reason mount
Lordly and a quenchless force,
Lighting Pain to its mad source,

Scaring Fear till Fear escapes,
Shot through all its phantom shapes.
Then your spirit will perceive
Fleshly seed of fleshly sins ;
Where the passions interweave,
How the serpent tangle spins
Of the sense of Earth misprised,
Brainlessly unrecognized ;
She being Spirit in her clods,
Footway to the God of Gods.
Then for you are pleasures pure,
Sureties as the stars are sure :
Not the wanton beckoning flags
Which, of flattery and delight,
Wax to the grim Habit-Hags
Riding souls of men to night :
Pleasures that through blood run sane,
Quickening spirit from the brain.
Each of each in sequent birth,
Blood and brain and spirit, three
(Say the deepest gnomes of Earth),
Join for true felicity.
Are they parted, then expect
Some one sailing will be wrecked :
Separate hunting are they sped,
Scan the morsel coveted.
Earth that Triad is : she hides
Joy from him who that divides ;
Showers it when the three are one
Glassing her in union.
Earth your haven, Earth your helm,
You command a double realm ;

Labouring here to pay your debt,
Till your little sun shall set ;
Leaving her the future task :
Loving her too well to ask.
Eglantine that climbs the yew,
She her darkest wreathes for those
Knowing her the Ever-new,
And themselves the kin o' the rose.
Life, the chisel, axe and sword,
Wield who have her depths explored :
Life, the dream, shall be their robe,
Large as air about the globe ;
Life, the question, hear its cry
Echoed with concordant Why ;
Life, the small self-dragon ramped,
Thrill for service to be stamped.
Ay, and over every height
Life for them shall wave a wand :
That, the last, where sits affright,
Homely shows the stream beyond.
Love the light and be its lynx,
You will track her and attain ;
Read her as no cruel Sphinx
In the woods of Westermains.
Daily fresh the woods are ranged ;
Glooms which elsewhere appal,
Sounded : here, their worths exchanged,
Urban joins with pastoral :
Little lost, save what may drop
Husk-like, and the mind preserves.
Natural overgrowths they lop,
Yet from nature neither swerves,

Trained or savage : for this cause :
Of our Earth they ply the laws,
Have in Earth their feeding root,
Mind of man and bent of brute.
Hear that song ; both wild and ruled.
Hear it : is it wail or mirth ?
Ordered, bubbled, quite unschooled ?
None, and all : it springs of Earth.
O but hear it ! 'tis the mind ;
Mind that with deep Earth unites,
Round the solid trunk to wind
Rings of clasping parasites.
Music have you there to feed
Simplest and most soaring need.
Free to wind, and in desire
Winding, they to her attached
Feel the trunk a spring of fire,
And ascend to heights unmatched,
Whence the tidal world is viewed
As a sea of windy wheat,
Momently black, barren, rude ;
Golden-brown, for harvest meet ;
Dragon-reaped from folly-sown ;
Bride-like to the sickle-blade :
Quick it varies, while the moan,
Moan of a sad creature strayed,
Chiefly is its voice. So flesh
Conjures tempest-flails to thresh
Good from worthless. Some clear lamps
Light it ; more of dead marsh-damps.
Monster is it still, and blind,
Fit but to be led by Pain.

Glance we at the paths behind,
Fruitful sight has Westermain.
There we laboured, and in turn
Forward our blown lamps discern,
As you see on the dark deep
Far the loftier billows leap,

Foam for beacon bear.

Hither, hither, if you will,
Drink instruction, or instil,
Run the woods like vernal sap,
Crying, hail to luminousness !

But have care.

In yourself may lurk the trap :
On conditions they caress.
Here you meet the light invoked :
Here is never secret cloaked.
Doubt you with the monster's fry
All his orbit may exclude ;
Are you of the stiff, the dry,
Cursing the not understood ;
Grasp you with the monster's claws ;
Govern with his truncheon-saws ;
Hate, the shadow of a grain ;
You are lost in Westermain :
Earthward swoops a vulture sun,
Nighted upon carrion :
Straightway venom winecups shout
Toasts to One whose eyes are out :
Flowers along the reeling floor
Drip henbane and hellebore :
Beauty, of her tresses shorn,
Shrieks as nature's maniac :

Hideousness on hoof and horn
Tumbles, yapping in her track :
Haggard Wisdom, stately once,
Leers fantastical and trips :
Allegory drums the sconce,
Impiousness nibblenips.
Imp that dances, imp that flits,
Imp o' the demon-growing girl,
Maddest ! whirl with imp o' the pits
Round you, and with them you whirl
Fast where pours the fountain-rout
Out of Him whose eyes are out :
Multitudes on multitudes,
Drenched in wallowing devilry :
And you ask where you may be,
 In what reek of a lair
Given to bones and ogre-broods :
 And they yell you Where.
Enter these enchanted woods,
 You who dare.

MELAMPUS

I

WITH love exceeding a simple love of the things
That glide in grasses and rubble of woody
wreck ;
Or change their perch on a beat of quivering wings
From branch to branch, only restful to pipe and
peck ;
Or, bristled, curl at a touch their snouts in a ball ;
Or cast their web between bramble and thorny hook ;
The good physician Melampus, loving them all,
Among them walked, as a scholar who reads a book.

II

For him the woods were a home and gave him the key
Of knowledge, thirst for their treasures in herbs and
flowers.
The secrets held by the creatures nearer than we
To earth he sought, and the link of their life with
ours :
And where alike we are, unlike where, and the veined
Division, veined parallel, of a blood that flows
In them, in us, from the source by man unattained
Save marks he well what the mystical woods disclose.

III

And this he deemed might be boon of love to a breast
Embracing tenderly each little motive shape,
The prone, the flitting, who seek their food whither best
Their wits direct, whither best from their foes escape :

For closer drawn to our mother's natural milk,
As babes they learn where her motherly help is great :
They know the juice for the honey, juice for the silk,
And need they medical antidotes find them straight.

IV

Of earth and sun they are wise, they nourish their
 broods,
Weave, build, hive, burrow and battle, take joy
 and pain
Like swimmers varying billows : never in woods
Runs white insanity fleeing itself : all sane
The woods revolve : as the tree its shadowing limns
To some resemblance in motion, the rooted life
Restrains disorder : you hear the primitive hymns
Of earth in woods issue wild of the web of strife.

V

Now sleeping once on a day of marvellous fire,
A brood of snakes he had cherished in grave regret
That death his people had dealt their dam and their sire,
Through savage dread of them, crept to his neck, and
 set
Their tongues to lick him : the swift affectionate tongue
Of each ran licking the slumberer : then his ears
A forked red tongue tickled shrewdly : sudden upsprung,
He heard a voice piping : Ay, for he has no fears !

VI

A bird said that, in the notes of birds, and the speech
 Of men, it seemed : and another renewed : He moves
 To learn and not to pursue, he gathers to teach ;
 He feeds his young as do we, and as we love loves.
 No fears have I of a man who goes with his head
 To earth, chance looking aloft at us, kind of hand :
 I feel to him as to earth of whom we are fed ;
 I pipe him much for his good could he understand.

VII

Melampus touched at his ears, laid finger on wrist :
 He was not dreaming, he sensibly felt and heard.
 Above, through leaves, where the tree-twigs thick
 intertwist,
 He spied the birds and the bill of the speaking bird.
 His cushion mosses in shades of various green,
 The lumped, the antlered, he pressed, while the
 sunny snake
 Slipped under : draughts he had drunk of clear
 Hippocrene
 It seemed, and sat with a gift of the Gods awake.

VIII

Divinely thrilled was the man, exultingly full,
 As quick well-waters that come of the heart of earth,
 Ere yet they dart in a brook are one bubble-pool
 To light and sound, wedding both at the leap of birth.

The soul of light vivid shone, a stream within stream ;
The soul of sound from a musical shell outflow ;
Where others hear but a hum and see but a beam,
The tongue and eye of the fountain of life he knew.

IX

He knew the Hours : they were round him, laden with
seed

Of hours bestrewn upon vapour, and one by one
They winged as ripened in fruit the burden decreed
For each to scatter ; they flushed like the buds in sun,
Bequeathing seed to successive similar rings,
Their sisters, bearers to men of what men have
earned :

He knew them, talked with the yet unreddened ; the
stings,

The sweets, they warmed at their bosoms divined,
discerned.

X

Not unsolicited, sought by diligent feet,

By riddling fingers expanded, oft watched in growth
With brooding deep as the noon-ray's quickening wheat,
Ere touch'd, the pendulous flower of the plants of
sloth,

The plants of rigidity, answered question and squeeze,

Revealing wherefore it bloomed uninviting, bent,
Yet making harmony breathe of life and disease,
The deeper chord of a wonderful instrument.

XI

So passed he luminous-eyed for earth and the fates
We arm to bruise or caress us : his ears were charged
With tones of love in a whirl of voluble hates,
With music wrought of distraction his heart enlarged.
Celestial-shining, though mortal, singer, though mute,
He drew the Master of harmonies, voiced or stilled,
To seek him ; heard at the silent medicine-root
A song, beheld in fulfilment the unfulfilled.

XII

Him Phoebus, lending to darkness colour and form
Of light's excess, many lessons and counsels gave,
Showed Wisdom lord of the human intricate swarm,
And whence prophetic it looks on the hives that rave,
And how acquired, of the zeal of love to acquire,
And where it stands, in the centre of life a sphere ;
And Measure, mood of the lyre, the rapturous lyre,
He said was Wisdom, and struck him the notes to hear.

XIII

Sweet, sweet : 'twas glory of vision, honey, the breeze
In heat, the run of the river on root and stone,
All senses joined, as the sister Pierides
Are one, uplifting their chorus, the Nine, his own.
In stately order, evolved of sound into sight,
From sight to sound intershifting, the man descried
The growths of earth, his adored, like day out of night,
Ascend in song, seeing nature and song allied.

XIV

And there vitality, there, there solely in song,
Resides, where earth and her uses to men, their needs,
Their forceful cravings, the theme are : there is it strong,
The Master said : and the studious eye that reads,
 (Yea, even as earth to the crown of Gods on the
 mount),
In links divine with the lyrical tongue is bound.
Pursue thy craft : it is music drawn of a fount
To spring perennial ; well-spring is common ground.

XV

Melampus dwelt among men : physician and sage
He served them, loving them, healing them ; sick or
 maimed,
Or them that frenzied in some delirious rage
 Outran the measure, his juice of the woods reclaimed.
He played on men, as his master, Phoebus, on strings
 Melodious : as the God did he drive and check,
Through love exceeding a simple love of the things
 That glide in grasses and rubble of woody wreck.

X

LOVE IN THE VALLEY

UNDER yonder beech-tree single on the green-sward,
Couched with her arms behind her golden head,
Knees and tresses folded to slip and ripple idly,
Lies my young love sleeping in the shade.
Had I the heart to slide an arm beneath her,
Press her parting lips as her waist I gather slow,
Waking in amazement she could not but embrace me :
Then would she hold me and never let me go ?

Shy as the squirrel and wayward as the swallow,
Swift as the swallow along the river's light
Circling the surface to meet his mirrored winglets,
Fleeter she seems in her stay than in her flight.
Shy as the squirrel that leaps among the pine-tops,
Wayward as the swallow overhead at set of sun,
She whom I love is hard to catch and conquer,
Hard, but O the glory of the winning were she won !

When her mother tends her before the laughing mirror,
Tying up her laces, looping up her hair,
Often she thinks, were this wild thing wedded,
More love should I have, and much less care.
When her mother tends her before the lighted mirror,
Loosening her laces, combing down her curls,
Often she thinks, were this wild thing wedded,
I should miss but one for many boys and girls.

Heartless she is as the shadow in the meadows
Flying to the hills on a blue and breezy noon.
No, she is athirst and drinking up her wonder :
Earth to her is young as the slip of the new moon.
Deals she an unkindness, 'tis but her rapid measure,
Even as in a dance ; and her smile can heal no less :
Like the swinging May-cloud that pelts the flowers
with hailstones
Off a sunny border, she was made to bruise and bless.

Lovely are the curves of the white owl sweeping
Wavy in the dusk lit by one large star.
Lone on the fir-branch, his rattle-note unvaried,
Brooding o'er the gloom, spins the brown eve-jar.
Darker grows the valley, more and more forgetting :
So were it with me if forgetting could be willed.
Tell the grassy hollow that holds the bubbling well-
spring,
Tell it to forget the source that keeps it filled.

Stepping down the hill with her fair companions,
Arm in arm, all against the raying West,
Boldly she sings, to the merry tune she marches
Brave in her shape, and sweeter unpossessed.
Sweeter, for she is what my heart first awaking
Whispered the world was ; morning light is she.
Love that so desires would fain keep her changeless ;
Fain would fling the net, and fain have her free.

Happy happy time, when the white star hovers
Low over dim fields fresh with bloomy dew,
Near the face of dawn, that draws athwart the darkness,
Threading it with colour, like yewberries the yew.

Thicker crowd the shades as the grave East deepens
Glowing, and with crimson a long cloud swells.
Maiden still the morn is ; and strange she is, and
secret ;
Strange her eyes ; her cheeks are cold as cold sea-
shells.

Sunrays, leaning on our southern hills and lighting
Wild cloud-mountains that drag the hills along,
Oft ends the day of your shifting brilliant laughter
Chill as a dull face frowning on a song.
Ay, but shows the South-West a ripple-feathered bosom
Blown to silver while the clouds are shaken and ascend
Scaling the mid-heavens as they stream, there comes a
sunset
Rich, deep like love in beauty without end.

When at dawn she sighs, and like an infant to the
window
Turns grave eyes craving light, released from dreams,
Beautiful she looks, like a white water-lily
Bursting out of bud in havens of the streams.
When from bed she rises clothed from neck to ankle
In her long nightgown sweet as boughs of May,
Beautiful she looks, like a tall garden lily
Pure from the night, and splendid for the day.

Mother of the dews, dark eye-lashed twilight,
Low-lidded twilight, o'er the valley's brim,
Rounding on thy breast sings the dew-delighted skylark,
Clear as though the dewdrops had their voice in him.

Hidden where the rose-flush drinks the rayless planet,
Fountain-full he pours the spraying fountain-showers.
Let me hear her laughter, I would have her ever
Cool as dew in twilight, the lark above the flowers.

All the girls are out with their baskets for the primrose ;
Up lanes, woods through, they troop in joyful bands.
My sweet leads : she knows not why, but now she loiters,
Eyes the bent anemones, and hangs her hands.
Such a look will tell that the violets are peeping,
Coming the rose : and unaware a cry
Springs in her bosom for odours and for colour,
Covert and the nightingale ; she knows not why.

Kerchiefed head and chin she darts between her tulips,
Streaming like a willow gray in arrowy rain :
Some bend beaten cheek to gravel, and their angel
She will be ; she lifts them, and on she speeds again.
Black the driving raincloud breasts the iron gate-way :
She is forth to cheer a neighbour lacking mirth.
So when sky and grass met rolling dumb for thunder
Saw I once a white dove, sole light of earth.

Prim little scholars are the flowers of her garden,
Trained to stand in rows, and asking if they please.
I might love them well but for loving more the wild
ones :

O my wild ones ! they tell me more than these.
You, my wild one, you tell of honied field-rose,
Violet, blushing eglantine in life ; and even as they,
They by the wayside are earnest of your goodness,
You are of life's, on the banks that line the way.

Peering at her chamber the white crowns the red rose,
Jasmine winds the porch with stars two and three.
Parted is the window; she sleeps; the starry jasmine
Breathes a falling breath that carries thoughts of me.
Sweeter unpossessed, have I said of her my sweetest?
Not while she sleeps: while she sleeps the jasmine
breathes,
Luring her to love; she sleeps; the starry jasmine
Bears me to her pillow under white rose-wreaths.

Yellow with birdfoot-trefoil are the grass-glades;
Yellow with cinquefoil of the dew-gray leaf;
Yellow with stonecrop; the moss-mounds are yellow;
Blue-necked the wheat sways, yellowing to the sheaf:
Green-yellow bursts from the copse the laughing yaffle;
Sharp as a sickle is the edge of shade and shine:
Earth in her heart laughs looking at the heavens,
Thinking of the harvest: I look and think of mine.

This I may know: her dressing and undressing
Such a change of light shows as when the skies in
sport
Shift from cloud to moonlight; or edging over thunder
Slips a ray of sun; or sweeping into port
White sails furl; or on the ocean borders
White sails lean along the waves leaping green.
Visions of her shower before me, but from eyesight
Guarded she would be like the sun were she seen.

Front door and back of the mossed old farmhouse
Open with the morn, and in a breezy link
Freshly sparkles garden to stripe-shadowed orchard,
Green across a rill where on sand the minnows wink.

Busy in the grass the early sun of summer
Swarms, and the blackbird's mellow fluting notes
Call my darling up with round and roguish challenge :
Quaintest, richest carol of all the singing throats !

Cool was the woodside ; cool as her white dairy
Keeping sweet the cream-pan ; and there the boys
from school,
Cricketing below, rushed brown and red with sunshine ;
O the dark translucence of the deep-eyed cool !
Spying from the farm, herself she fetched a pitcher
Full of milk, and tilted for each in turn the beak.
Then a little fellow, mouth up and on tiptoe,
Said, ' I will kiss you : ' she laughed and leaned her
cheek.

Doves of the fir-wood walling high our red roof
Through the long noon coo, crooning through the coo.
Loose droop the leaves, and down the sleepy roadway
Sometimes pipes a chaffinch ; loose droops the blue.
Cows flap a slow tail knee-deep in the river,
Breathless, given up to sun and gnat and fly.
Nowhere is she seen ; and if I see her nowhere,
Lightning may come, straight rains and tiger sky.

O the golden sheaf, the rustling treasure-armful !
O the nutbrown tresses nodding interlaced !
O the treasure-tresses one another over
Nodding ! O the girdle slack about the waist !
Slain are the poppies that shot their random scarlet
Quick amid the wheatears : wound about the waist,

Gathered, see these brides of Earth one blush of
ripeness!

O the nutbrown tresses nodding interlaced!

Large and smoky red the sun's cold disk drops,
Clipped by naked hills, on violet shaded snow:
Eastward large and still lights up a bower of moonrise,
Whence at her leisure steps the moon aglow.
Nightlong on black print-branches our beech-tree
Gazes in this whiteness: nightlong could I.
Here may life on death or death on life be painted.
Let me clasp her soul to know she cannot die!

Gossips count her faults; they scour a narrow chamber
Where there is no window, read not heaven or her.
'When she was a tiny,' one aged woman quavers,
Plucks at my heart and leads me by the ear.
Faults she had once as she learnt to run and tumbled:
Faults of feature some see, beauty not complete.
Yet, good gossips, beauty that makes holy
Earth and air, may have faults from head to feet.

Hither she comes; she comes to me; she lingers,
Deepens her brown eyebrows, while in new surprise
High rise the lashes in wonder of a stranger;
Yet am I the light and living of her eyes.
Something friends have told her fills her heart to
brimming,
Nets her in her blushes, and wounds her, and tames. —
Sure of her haven, O like a dove alighting,
Arms up, she dropped: our souls were in our names.

Soon will she lie like a white-frost sunrise.

Yellow oats and brown wheat, barley pale as rye,
Long since your sheaves have yielded to the thresher,
Felt the girdle loosened, seen the tresses fly.

Soon will she lie like a blood-red sunset.

Swift with the to-morrow, green-winged Spring!
Sing from the South-West, bring her back the truants,
Nightingale and swallow, song and dipping wing.

Soft new beech-leaves, up to beamy April

Spreading bough on bough a primrose mountain, you
Lucid in the moon, raise lilies to the skyfields,

Youngest green transfused in silver shining through:
Fairer than the lily, than the wild white cherry:

Fair as in image my seraph love appears
Borne to me by dreams when dawn is at my eyelids:
Fair as in the flesh she swims to me on tears.

Could I find a place to be alone with heaven,

I would speak my heart out: heaven is my need.

Every woodland tree is flushing like the dog-wood,

Flashing like the whitebeam, swaying like the reed.

Flushing like the dogwood crimson in October;

Streaming like the flag-reed South-West blown;

Flashing as in gusts the sudden-lighted whitebeam:

All seem to know what is for heaven alone.

LUCIFER IN STARLIGHT

ON a starred night Prince Lucifer uprose.
Tired of his dark dominion swung the fiend
Above the rolling ball in cloud part screened,
Where sinners hugged their spectre of repose.
Poor prey to his hot fit of pride were those.
And now upon his western wing he leaned,
Now his huge bulk o'er Africa careened,
Now the black planet shadowed Arctic snows.
Soaring through wider zones that pricked his scars
With memory of the old revolt from Awe,
He reached a middle height, and at the stars,
Which are the brain of heaven, he looked, and sank.
Around the ancient track marched, rank on rank,
The army of unalterable law.

THE STAR SIRIUS

BRIGHT Sirius! that when Orion pales
To dotlings under moonlight still art keen
With cheerful fervour of a warrior's mien
Who holds in his great heart the battle-scales:
Unquenched of flame though swift the flood assails,
Reducing many lustrous to the lean:
Be thou my star, and thou in me be seen
To show what source divine is, and prevails.
Long watches through, at one with godly night,
I mark thee planting joy in constant fire;
And thy quick beams, whose jets of life inspire
Life to the spirit, passion for the light,
Dark Earth since first she lost her lord from sight
Has viewed and felt them sweep her as a lyre.

THE SPIRIT OF SHAKESPEARE

I

THY greatest knew thee, Mother Earth ; unsoured
He knew thy sons. He probed from hell to hell
Of human passions, but of love deflowered
His wisdom was not, for he knew thee well.
Thence came the honeyed corner at his lips,
The conquering smile wherein his spirit sails
Calm as the God who the white sea-wave whips,
Yet full of speech and intershifting tales,
Close mirrors of us : thence had he the laugh
We feel is thine : broad as ten thousand beeves
At pasture ! thence thy songs, that winnow chaff
From grain, bid sick Philosophy's last leaves
Whirl, if they have no response — they enforced
To fatten Earth when from her soul divorced.

How smiles he at a generation ranked
 In gloomy noddings over life! They pass.
 Not he to feed upon a breast unthanked,
 Or eye a beauteous face in a cracked glass.
 But he can spy that little twist of brain
 Which moved some weighty leader of the blind,
 Unwitting 'twas the goad of personal pain,
 To view in curst eclipse our Mother's mind,
 And show of some rigid harri-
 dan
 The wretched bondmen till the end of time.
 O lived the Master now to paint us Man,
 That little twist of brain would ring a chime
 Of whence it came and what it caused, to start
 Thunders of laughter, clearing air and heart.

THE NUPTIALS OF ATTLA

I

FLAT as to an eagle's eye,
Earth hung under Attila.
Sign for carnage gave he none.
In the peace of his disdain,
Sun and rain, and rain and sun,
Cherished men to wax again,
Crawl, and in their manner die.
On his people stood a frost.
Like the charger cut in stone,
Rearing stiff, the warrior host,
Which had life from him alone,
Craved the trumpet's eager note,
As the bridled earth the Spring.
Rusty was the trumpet's throat.
He let chief and prophet rave;
Venturous earth around him string
Threads of grass and slender rye,
Wave them, and untrampled wave.
O for the time when God did cry,
Eye and have, my Attila!

II

Scorn of conquest filled like sleep
Him that drank of havoc deep
When the Green Cat pawed the globe:
When the horsemen from his bow
Shot in sheaves and made the foe
Crimson fringes of a robe,

Trailed o'er towns and fields in woe;
When they streaked the rivers red,
When the saddle was the bed.
Attila, my Attila!

III

He breathed peace and pulled a flower.
Eye and have, my Attila!
This was the damsel Ildico,
Rich in bloom until that hour:
Shyer than the forest doe
Twinkling slim through branches green.
Yet the shyest shall be seen.
Make the bed for Attila!

IV

Seen of Attila, desired,
She was led to him straightway:
Radiantly was she attired;
Rifled lands were her array,
Jewels bled from weeping crowns,
Gold of woeful fields and towns.
She stood pallid in the light.
How she walked, how withered white,
From the blessing to the board,
She who should have proudly blushed,
Women whispered, asking why,
Hinting of a youth, and hushed.
Was it terror of her lord?
Was she childish? was she sly?
Was it the bright mantle's dye

Drained her blood to hues of grief
Like the ash that shoots the spark?
See the green tree all in leaf:
See the green tree stripped of bark! —
 Make the bed for Attila!

V

Round the banquet-table's load
Scores of iron horsemen rode;
Chosen warriors, keen and hard;
Grain of threshing battle-dints;
Attila's fierce body-guard,
Smelling war like fire in flints.
Grant them peace be fugitive!
Iron-capped and iron-heeled,
Each against his fellow's shield
Smote the spear-head, shouting, Live,
 Attila! my Attila!
Eagle, eagle of our breed,
Eagle, beak the lamb, and feed!
Have her, and unleash us! live,
 Attila! my Attila!

VI

He was of the blood to shine
Bronze in joy, like skies that scorch.
Beaming with the goblet wine
In the wavering of the torch,
Looked he backward on his bride.
 Eye and have, my Attila!

Fair in her wide robe was she :
Where the robe and vest divide,
Fair she seemed surpassingly :
Soft, yet vivid as the stream
Danube rolls in the moonbeam
Through rock-barriers : but she smiled
Never, she sat cold as salt :
Open-mouthed as a young child
Wondering with a mind at fault.
Make the bed for Attila !

VII

Under the thin hoop of gold
Whence in waves her hair outrolled,
'Twixt her brows the women saw
Shadows of a vulture's claw
Gript in flight : strange knots that sped
Closing and dissolving aye :
Such as wicked dreams betray
When pale dawn creeps o'er the bed.
They might show the common pang
Known to virgins, in whom dread
Hunts their bliss like famished hounds ;
While the chiefs with roaring rounds
Tossed her to her lord, and sang
Praise of him whose hand was large,
Cheers for beauty brought to yield,
Chirrup of the trot afield,
Hurrahs of the battle-charge.

VIII

Those rock-faces hung with weed
Reddened: their great days of speed,
Slaughter, triumph, flood and flame,
Like a jealous frenzy wrought,
Scoffed at them and did them shame,
Quaffing idle, conquering naught.
O for the time when God decreed

Earth the prey of Attila!

God called on thee in his wrath,
Trample it to mire! 'Twas done.
Swift as Danube clove our path
Down from East to Western sun.
Huns! behold your pasture, gaze,
Take, our king said: heel to flank
(Whisper it, the warhorse neighs!)
Forth we drove, and blood we drank
Fresh as dawn-dew: earth was ours:
Men were flocks we lashed and spurned:
Fast as windy flame devours,
Flame along the wind, we burned.
Arrow, javelin, spear and sword!
Here the snows and there the plains;
On! our signal: onward poured
Torrents of the tightened reins,
Foaming over vine and corn
Hot against the city-wall.
Whisper it, you sound a horn
To the grey beast in the stall!
Yea, he whinnies at a nod.
O for sound of the trumpet-notes!

O for the time when thunder-shod,
He that scarce can munch his oats,
Hung on the peaks, brooded aloof,
Champed the grain of the wrath of God,
Pressed a cloud on the cowering roof,
Snorted out of the blackness fire!
Scarlet broke the sky, and down,
Hammering West with print of his hoof,
He burst out of the bosom of ire
Sharp as eyelight under thy frown,
Attila, my Attila!

IX

Ravaged cities rolling smoke
Thick on cornfields dry and black,
Wave his banners, bear his yoke.
Track the lightning, and you track
Attila. They moan: 'tis he!
Bleed: 'tis he! Beneath his foot
Leagues are deserts charred and mute;
Where he passed, there passed a sea.
Attila, my Attila!

X

—Who breathed on the king cold breath?
Said a voice amid the host,
He is Death that weds a ghost,
Else a ghost that weds with Death?
Ildico's chill little hand
Shuddering he beheld: austere

Stared, as one who would command
Sight of what has filled his ear :
Plucked his thin beard, laughed disdain.
Feast, ye Huns ! His arm he raised,
Like the warrior, battle-dazed,
Joining to the fight amain.
Make the bed for Attila !

XI

Silent Ildico stood up.
King and chief to pledge her well,
Shocked sword sword and cup on cup,
Clamouring like a brazen bell.
Silent stepped the queenly slave.
Fair, by heaven ! she was to meet
On a midnight, near a grave,
Flapping wide the winding-sheet.

XII

Death and she walked through the crowd,
Out beyond the flush of light.
Ceremonious women bowed
Following her : 'twas middle night.
Then the warriors each on each
Spied, nor overloudly laughed ;
Like the victims of the leech,
Who have drunk of a strange draught.

XIII

Attila remained. Even so
Frowned he when he struck the blow,

Brained his horse that stumbled twice,
On a bloody day in Gaul,
Bellowing, Perish omens! All
Marvelled at the sacrifice,
But the battle, swinging dim,
Rang off that axe-blow for him.
Attila, my Attila!

XIV

Brightening over Danube wheeled
Star by star; and she, most fair,
Sweet as victory half-revealed,
Seized to make him glad and young;
She, O sweet as the dark sign
Given him oft in battles gone,
When the voice within said, Dare!
And the trumpet-notes were sprung
Rapturous for the charge in line:
She lay waiting: fair as dawn
Wrapped in folds of night she lay;
Secret, lustrous; flaglike there,
Waiting him to stream and ray,
With one loosening blush outflung,
Colours of his hordes of horse
Ranked for combat: still he hung
Like the fever dreading air,
Cursed of heat; and as a corse
Gathers vultures, in his brain
Images of her eyes and kiss
Plucked at the limbs that could remain
Loitering nigh the doors of bliss.
Make the bed for Attila!

Passion on one hand, on one,
 Destiny led forth the Hun.
 Heard ye outcries of affright,
 Voices that through many a fray,
 In the press of flag and spear,
 Warned the king of peril near?
 Men were dumb, they gave him way,
 Eager heads to left and right,
 Like the bearded standard, thrust,
 As in battle, for a nod
 From their lord of battle-dust.

Attila, my Attila!

Slow between the lines he trod.
 Saw ye not the sun drop slow
 On this nuptial day, ere eve
 Pierced him on the couch aglow?

Attila, my Attila!

Here and there his heart would cleave
 Clotted memory for a space:
 Some stout chief's familiar face,
 Choicest of his fighting brood,
 Touched him, as 'twere one to know
 Ere he met his bride's embrace.

Attila, my Attila!

Twisting fingers in a beard
 Scant as winter underwood,
 With a narrowed eye he peered;
 Like the sunset's graver red
 Up old pine-stems. Grave he stood
 Eyeing them on whom was shed

Burning light from him alone.

Attila, my Attila !

Red were they whose mouths recalled
Where the slaughter mounted high,
High on it, o'er earth appalled,
He; heaven's finger in their sight
Raising him on waves of dead :
Up to heaven his trumpets blown.
O for the time when God's delight

Crowned the head of Attila !

Hungry river of the crag
Stretching hands for earth he came :
Force and Speed astride his name
Pointed back to spear and flag.
He came out of miracle cloud,
Lightning-swift and spectre-lean.
Now those days are in a shroud :
Have him to his ghostly queen.

Make the bed for Attila !

XVI

One, with winecups overstrung,
Cried him farewell in Rome's tongue.
Who? for the great king turned as though
Wrath to the shaft's head strained the bow.
Nay, not wrath the king possessed,
But a radiance of the breast.
In that sound he had the key
Of his cunning malady.
Lo, where gleamed the sapphire lake,
Leo, with his Rome at stake,

Drew blank air to hues and forms;
Whereof Two that shone distinct,
Linked as orb'd stars are linked,
Clear among the myriad swarms,
In a constellation, dashed
Full on horse and rider's eyes
Sunless light, but light it was —
Light that blinded and abashed,
Froze his members, bade him pause,
Caught him mid-gallop, blazed him home.

Attila, my Attila!

What are streams that cease to flow?
What was Attila, rolled thence,
Cheated by a juggler's show?
Like that lake of blue intense,
Under tempest lashed to foam,
Lurid radiance, as he passed,
Filled him, and around was glassed,
When deep-voiced he uttered, Rome!

XVII

Rome! the word was: and like meat
Flung to dogs the word was torn.
Soon Rome's magic priests shall bleat
Round their magic Pope forlorn!
Loud they swore the king had sworn
Vengeance on the Roman cheat,
Ere he passed as, grave and still,
Danube through the shouting hill:
Sworn it by his naked life!

Eagle, snakes these women are :
Take them on the wing ! but war,
Smoking war's the warrior's wife !
Then for plunder ! then for brides
Won without a winking priest ! —
Danube whirled his train of tides
Black toward the yellow East.
Make the bed for Attila !

XVIII

Chirrup of the trot afield,
Hurrahs of the battle-charge,
How they answered, how they pealed,
When the morning rose and drew
Bow and javelin, lance and targe,
In the nuptial casement's view !
Attila, my Attila !
Down the hillspurs, out of tents
Glimmering in mid-forest, through
Mists of the cool morning scents,
Forth from city-alley, court,
Arch, the bounding horsemen flew,
Joined along the plains of dew,
Raced and gave the rein to sport,
Closed and streamed like curtain-rents
Fluttered by a wind, and flowed
Into squadrons : trumpets blew,
Chargers neighed, and trappings glowed
Brave as the bright Orient's.
Look on the seas that run to greet
Sunrise : look on the leagues of wheat :

Look on the lines and squares that fret
Leaping to level the lance blood-wet.
Tens of thousands, man and steed,
Tossing like field-flowers in Spring;
Ready to be hurled at need
Whither their great lord may sling.
Finger Romeward, Romeward, King!
 Attila, my Attila!
Still the woman holds him fast
As a night-flag round the mast.

XIX

Nigh upon the fiery noon,
Out of ranks a roaring burst.
'Ware white women like the moon!
They are poison: they have thirst
First for love, and next for rule.
Jealous of the army, she?
Ho, the little wanton fool!
We were his before she squealed
Blind for mother's milk, and heeled
Kicking on her mother's knee.
His in life and death are we:
She but one flower of a field.
We have given him bliss tenfold
In an hour to match her night:
 Attila, my Attila!
Still her arms the master hold,
As on wounds the scarf winds tight.

XX

Over Danube day no more,
Like the warrior's planted spear,
Stood to hail the King: in fear
Western day knocked at his door.

Attila, my Attila!

Sudden in the army's eyes
Rolled a blast of lights and cries:
Flashing through them: Dead are ye!
Dead, ye Huns, and torn piecemeal!
See the ordered army reel
Stricken through the ribs: and see,
Wild for speed to cheat despair,
Horsemen, clutching knee to chin,
Crouch and dart they know not where.

Attila, my Attila!

Faces covered, faces bare,
Light the palace-front like jets
Of a dreadful fire within.
Beating hands and driving hair
Start on roof and parapets.
Dust rolls up; the slaughter din.
— Death to them who call him dead!
Death to them who doubt the tale!
Choking in his dusty veil,
Sank the sun on his death-bed.

Make the bed for Attila!

XXI

'Tis the room where thunder sleeps.
Frenzy, as a wave to shore

Surging, burst the silent door,
And drew back to awful deeps,
Breath beaten out, foam-white. Anew
Howled and pressed the ghastly crew,
Like storm-waters over rocks.

Attila, my Attila!
One long shaft of sunset red
Laid a finger on the bed.
Horror, with the snaky locks,
Shocked the surge to stiffened heaps,
Hoary as the glacier's head
Faced to the moon. Insane they look.
God it is in heaven who weeps
Fallen from his hand the Scourge he shook.
Make the bed for Attila!

XXII

Square along the couch, and stark,
Like the sea-rejected thing
Sea-sucked white, behold their King.

Attila, my Attila!
Beams that panted black and bright,
Scornful lightnings danced their sight:
Him they see an oak in bud,
Him an oaklog stripped of bark:
Him, their lord of day and night,
White, and lifting up his blood
Dumb for vengeance. Name us that,
Huddled in the corner dark,
Humped and grinning like a cat,
Teeth for lips! — 'tis she! she stares,
Glittering through her bristled hairs.

Rend her! Pierce her to the hilt!
She is Murder: have her out!
What! this little fist, as big
As the southern summer fig!
She is Madness, none may doubt.
Death, who dares deny her guilt!
Death, who says his blood she spilt!
Make the bed for Attila!

XXIII

Torch and lamp and sunset-red
Fell three-fingered on the bed.
In the torch the beard-hair scant
With the great breast seemed to pant:
In the yellow lamp the limbs
Wavered, as the lake-flower swims:
In the sunset red the dead
Dead avowed him, dry blood-red.

XXIV

Hatred of that abject slave,
Earth, was in each chieftain's heart.
Earth has got him, whom God gave,
Earth may sing, and earth shall smart!
Attila, my Attila!

XXV

Thus their prayer was raved and ceased.
Then had Vengeance of her feast
Scent in their quick pang to smite
Which they knew not, but huge pain

Urged them for some victim slain
Swift, and blotted from the sight.
Each at each, a crouching beast,
Glared, and quivered for the word.
Each at each, and all on that,
Humped and grinning like a cat,
Head-bound with its bridal-wreath.
Then the bitter chamber heard
Vengeance in a cauldron seethe.
Hurried counsel rage and craft
Yelped to hungry men, whose teeth
Hard the grey lip-ringlet gnawed,
Gleaming till their fury laughed.
With the steel-hilt in the clutch,
Eyes were shot on her that froze
In their blood-thirst overawed;
Burned to rend, yet feared to touch.
She that was his nuptial rose,
She was of his heart's blood clad :
Oh ! the last of him she had ! —
Could a little fist as big
As the southern summer fig,
Push a dagger's point to pierce
Ribs like those ? Who else ! They glared
Each at each. Suspicion fierce
Many a black remembrance bared.
Attila, my Attila !
Death, who dares deny her guilt !
Death, who says his blood she spilt !
Traitor he, who stands between !
Swift to hell, who harms the Queen !

She, the wild contention's cause,
Combed her hair with quiet paws.
Make the bed for Attila !

XXVI

Night was on the host in arms.
Night, as never night before,
Hearkened to an army's roar
Breaking up in snaky swarms :
Torch and steel and snorting steed,
Hunted by the cry of blood,
Cursed with blindness, mad for day.
Where the torches ran a flood,
Tales of him and of the deed
Showered like a torrent spray.
Fear of silence made them strive
Loud in warrior-hymns that grew
Hoarse for slaughter yet unwreaked.
Ghostly Night across the hive,
With a crimson finger drew
Letters on,her breast and shrieked.
Night was on them like the mould
On the buried half alive.
Night, their bloody Queen, her fold
Wound on them and struck them through.
Make the bed for Attila !

XXVII

Earth has got him whom God gave,
Earth may sing, and earth shall smart !

None of earth shall know his grave.
They that dig with Death depart.
Attila, my Attila !

XXVIII

Thus their prayer was raved and passed :
Passed in peace their red sunset :
Hewn and earthed those men of sweat
Who had housed him in the vast,
Where no mortal might declare,
There lies he — his end was there !
Attila, my Attila !

XXIX

Kingless was the army left :
Of its head the race bereft.
Every fury of the pit
Tortured and dismembered it.
Lo, upon a silent hour,
When the pitch of frost subsides,
Danube with a shout of power
Loosens his imprisoned tides :
Wide around the frightened plains
Shake to hear his riven chains,
Dreadfuller than heaven in wrath,
As he makes himself a path :
High leap the ice-cracks, towering pile
Floes to bergs, and giant peers
Wrestle on a drifted isle ;
Island on ice-island rears ;

Dissolution battles fast :
Big the senseless Titans loom,
Through a mist of common doom
Striving which shall die the last :
Till a gentle-breathing morn
Frees the stream from bank to bank.
So the Empire built of scorn
Agonized, dissolved and sank.
Of the Queen no more was told
Than of leaf on Danube rolled.
Make the bed for Attila !

I

WE look for her that sunlike stood
Upon the forehead of our day,
An orb of nations, radiating food
For body and for mind alway.
Where is the Shape of glad array;
The nervous hands, the front of steel,
The clarion tongue? Where is the bold proud face?
We see a vacant place;
We hear an iron heel.

II

O she that made the brave appeal
For manhood when our time was dark,
And from our fetters drove the spark
Which was as lightning to reveal
New seasons, with the swifter play
Of pulses, and a benignant day;
She that divinely shook the dead
From living man; that stretched ahead
Her resolute forefinger straight,
And marched toward the gloomy gate
Of earth's Untried, gave note, and in
The good name of Humanity
Called forth the daring vision! she,
She likewise half corrupt of sin,
Angel and Wanton! can it be?

Her star has foundered in eclipse,
The shriek of madness on her lips ;
Shreds of her, and no more, we see.
There is horrible convulsion, smothered din,
As of one that in a grave-cloth struggles to be free.

III

Look not for spreading boughs
On the riven forest tree.
Look down where deep in blood and mire
Black thunder plants his feet and ploughs
The soil for ruin : that is France :
Still thrilling like a lyre,
Amazed to shivering discord from a fall
Sudden as that the lurid hosts recall
Who met in heaven the irreparable mischance.
O that is France !
The brilliant eyes to kindle bliss,
The shrewd quick lips to laugh and kiss,
Breasts that a sighing world inspire,
And laughter-dimpled countenance
Where soul and senses caught desire !

IV

Ever invoking fire from Heaven, the fire
Has grasped her, unconsumable, but framed
For all the ecstasies of suffering dire.
Mother of Pride, her sanctuary shamed :
Mother of Delicacy, and made a mark
For outrage : Mother of Luxury, stripped stark :

Mother of Heroes, bondsmen : thro' the rains,
 Across her boundaries, lo the league-long chains !
 Fond Mother of her martial youth ; they pass,
 Are spectres in her sight, are mown as grass !
 Mother of Honour, and dishonoured : Mother
 Of Glory, she condemned to crown with bays
 Her victor, and be fountain of his praise.
 Is there another curse ? There is another :
 Compassionate her madness : is she not
 Mother of Reason ? she that sees them mown
 Like grass, her young ones ! Yea, in the low groan
 And under the fixed thunder of this hour
 Which holds the animate world in one foul blot
 Tranced circumambient while relentless Power
 Beaks at her heart and claws her limbs down-thrown,
 She, with the plunging lightnings overshot,
 With madness for an armour against pain,
 With milkless breasts for little ones athirst,
 And round her all her noblest dying in vain,
 Mother of Reason is she, trebly cursed,
 To feel, to see, to justify the blow ;
 Chamber to chamber of her sequent brain
 Gives answer of the cause of her great woe,
 Inexorably echoing thro' the vaults,
 ' 'Tis thus they reap in blood, in blood who sow :
 ' This is the sum of self-absolv'd faults.'
 Doubt not that thro' her grief, with sight supreme,
 Thro' her delirium and despair's last dream,
 Thro' pride, thro' bright illusion and the brood
 Bewildering of her various Motherhood,
 The high strong light within her, tho' she bleeds,
 Traces the letters of returned misdeeds.

She sees what seed long sown, ripened of late,
Bears this fierce crop; and she discerns her fate
From origin to agony, and on
As far as the wave washes long and wan
Off one disastrous impulse: for of waves
Our life is, and our deeds are pregnant graves
Blown rolling to the sunset from the dawn.

v

Ah, what a dawn of splendour, when her sowers
Went forth and bent the necks of populations,
And of their terrors and humiliations
Wove her the starry wreath that earthward lowers
Now in the figure of a burning yoke!
Her legions traversed North and South and East,
Of triumph they enjoyed the glutton's feast:
They grafted the green sprig, they lopped the oak.
They caught by the beard the tempests, by the scalp
The icy precipices, and clove sheer through
The heart of horror of the pinnacled Alp,
Emerging not as men whom mortals knew.
They were the earthquake and the hurricane,
The lightnings and the locusts, plagues of blight,
Plagues of the revel: they were Deluge rain,
And dreaded Conflagration; lawless Might.
Death writes a reeling line along the snows,
Where under frozen mists they may be tracked,
Who men and elements provoked to foes,
And Gods: they were of God and Beast compact:
Abhorred of all. Yet, how they sucked the teats
Of Carnage, thirsty issue of their dam,

Whose eagles, angrier than their oriflamme,
Flushed the vext earth with blood, green earth forgets.
The gay young generations mask her grief ;
Where bled her children hangs the loaded sheaf.
Forgetful is green earth ; the Gods alone
Remember everlastingly : they strike
Remorselessly, and ever like for like.
By their great memories the Gods are known.

VI

They are with her now, and in her ears, and known.
'Tis they that cast her to the dust for Strength,
Their slave, to feed on her fair body's length,
That once the sweetest and the proudest shone ;
Scoring for hideous dismemberment
Her limbs, as were the anguish-taking breath
Gone out of her in the insufferable descent
From her high chieftainship ; as were she death,
Who hears a voice of justice, feels the knife
Of torture, drinks all ignominy of life.
They are with her, and the painful Gods might weep,
If ever rain of tears came out of heaven
To flatter Weakness and bid Conscience sleep,
Viewing the woe of this Immortal, driven
For the soul's life to drain the maddening cup
Of her own children's blood implacably :
Unsparing even as they to furrow up
The yellow land to likeness of a sea :
The bountiful fair land of vine and grain,
Of wit and grace and ardour, and strong roots,
Fruits perishable, imperishable fruits ;

Furrowed to likeness of the dim grey main
Behind the black obliterating cyclone.

VII

Behold, the Gods are with her, and are known.
Whom they abandon misery persecutes
No more : them half-eyed apathy may loan
The happiness of pitiable brutes.
Whom the just Gods abandon have no light,
No ruthless light of introspective eyes
That in the midst of misery scrutinize
The heart and its iniquities outright.
They rest, they smile and rest ; have earned perchance
Of ancient service quiet for a term ;
Quiet of old men dropping to the worm ;
And so goes out the soul. But not of France.
She cries for grief, and to the Gods she cries,
For fearfully their loosened hands chastize,
And icily they watch the rod's caress
Ravage her flesh from scourges merciless,
But she, inveterate of brain, discerns
That Pity has as little place as Joy
Among their roll of gifts ; for Strength she yearns,
For Strength, her idol once, too long her toy.
Lo, Strength is of the plain root-Virtues born :
Strength shall ye gain by service, prove in scorn,
Train by endurance, by devotion shape.
Strength is not won by miracle or rape.
It is the offspring of the modest years,
The gift of sire to son, thro' those firm laws
Which we name Gods ; which are the righteous cause,

The cause of man, and manhood's ministers.
Could France accept the fables of her priests,
Who blest her banners in this game of beasts,
And now bid hope that heaven will intercede
To violate its laws in her sore need,
She would find comfort in their opiates :
Mother of Reason ! can she cheat the Fates ?
Would she, the champion of the open mind,
The Omnipotent's prime gift—the gift of
growth —

Consent even for a night-time to be blind,
And sink her soul on the delusive sloth,
For fruits ethereal and material, both,
In peril of her place among mankind ?
The Mother of the many Laughters might
Call one poor shade of laughter in the light
Of her unwavering lamp to mark what things
The world puts faith in, careless of the truth :
What silly puppet-bodies danced on strings,
Attached by credence, we appear in sooth,
Demanding intercession, direct aid,

When the whole tragic tale hangs on a broken blade !

She swung the sword for centuries ; in a ' day
It slipped her, like a stream cut off from source.
She struck a feeble hand, and tried to pray,
Clamoured of treachery, and had recourse
To drunken outcries in her dream that Force
Needed but hear her shouting to obey.
Was she not formed to conquer ? The bright
plumes
Of crested vanity shed graceful nods :

Transcendent in her foundries, Arts and looms,
Had France to fear the vengeance of the Gods?
Her faith was on her battle-roll of names
Sheathed in the records of old war; with dance
And song she thrilled her warriors and her dames,
Embracing her Dishonourer: gave him France
From head to foot, France present and to come,
So she might hear the trumpet and the drum —
Bellona and Bacchante! rushing forth
On yon stout marching Schoolmen of the North.

Inveterate of brain, well knows she why
Strength failed her, faithful to himself the first:
Her dream is done, and she can read the sky,
And she can take into her heart the worst
Calamity to drug the shameful thought
Of days that made her as the man she served,
A name of terror, but a thing unnerved:
Buying the trickster, by the trickster bought,
She for dominion, he to patch a throne.

VIII

Henceforth of her the Gods are known,
Open to them her breast is laid.
Inveterate of brain, heart-valiant,
Never did fairer creature pant
Before the altar and the blade!

IX

Swift fall the blows, and men upbraid,
And friends give echo blunt and cold,
The echo of the forest to the axe.

Within her are the fires that wax
For resurrection from the mould.

X

She snatched at heaven's flame of old,
And kindled nations : she was weak :
Frail sister of her heroic prototype,
The Man ; for sacrifice unripe,
She too must fill a Vulture's beak.
Deride the vanquished, and acclaim
The conqueror, who stains her fame,
Still the Gods love her, for that of high aim
Is this good France, the bleeding thing they stripe.

XI

She shall rise worthier of her prototype
Thro' her abasement deep ; the pain that runs
From nerve to nerve some victory achieves.
They lie like circle-strewn soaked Autumn-leaves
Which stain the forest scarlet, her fair sons !
And of their death her life is : of their blood
From many streams now urging to a flood,
No more divided, France shall rise afresh.
Of them she learns the lesson of the flesh : —
The lesson writ in red since first Time ran
A hunter hunting down the beast in man :
That till the chasing out of its last vice,
The flesh was fashioned but for sacrifice.

Immortal Mother of a mortal host !
Thou suffering of the wounds that will not slay,

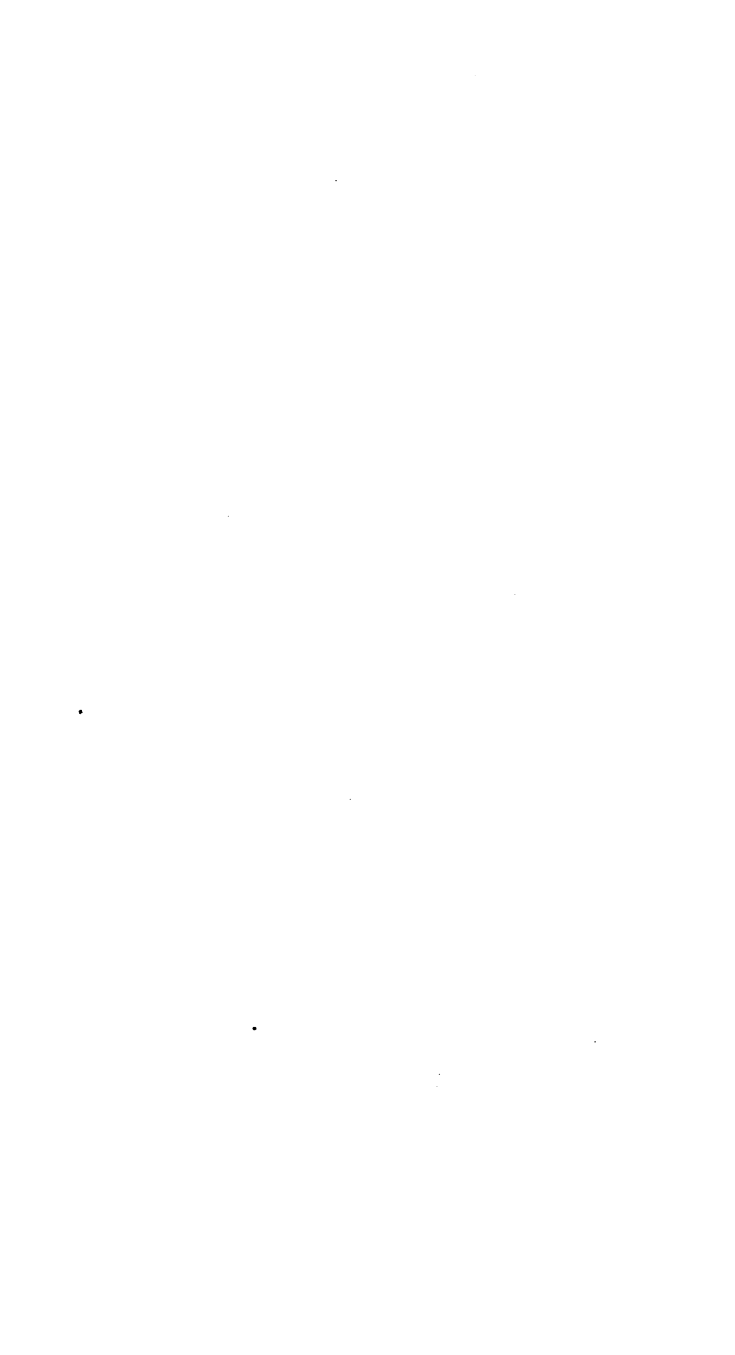
Wounds that bring death but take not life away! —
Stand fast and hearken while thy victors boast :
Hearken, and loathe that music evermore.
Slip loose thy garments woven of pride and shame :
The torture lurks in them, with them the blame
Shall pass to leave thee purer than before.
Undo thy jewels, thinking whence they came,
For what, and of the abominable name
Of her who in imperial beauty wore.

O Mother of a fated fleeting host
Conceived in the past days of sin, and born
Heirs of disease and arrogance and scorn,
Surrender, yield the weight of thy great ghost,
Like wings on air, to what the heavens proclaim
With trumpets from the multitudinous mounds
Where peace has filled the hearing of thy sons :
Albeit a pang of dissolution rounds
Each new discernment of the undying ones,
Do thou stoop to these graves here scattered wide
Along thy fields, as sunless billows roll ;
These ashes have the lesson for the soul.
'Die to thy Vanity, and strain thy Pride,
Strip off thy Luxury: that thou may'st live,
Die to thyself,' they say, 'as we have died
From dear existence, and the foe forgive,
Nor pray for aught save in our little space
To warm good seed to greet the fair earth's face.'
O Mother! take their counsel, and so shall
The broader world breathe in on this thy home,
Light clear for thee the counter-changing dome,
Strength give thee, like an ocean's vast expanse

Off mountain cliffs, the generations all,
Not whirling in their narrow rings of foam,
But as a river forward. Soaring France!
Now is Humanity on trial in thee:
Now may'st thou gather humankind in fee:
Now prove that Reason is a quenchless scroll;
Make of calamity thine aureole,
And bleeding lead us thro' the troubles of the sea.



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